US009182893B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Herold

(10) **Patent No.: US 9,182,893 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: *Nov. 10, 2015**

(54) **SHARING ANNOTATIONS OF DIGITAL ITEMS**

(71) Applicant: **FACEBOOK, INC.**, Menlo Park, CA (US)

(72) Inventor: **June R. Herold**, Falls Church, VA (US)

(73) Assignee: **FACEBOOK, INC.**, Menlo Park, CA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/160,210**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 21, 2014**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2014/0136983 A1 May 15, 2014

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 13/619,169, filed on Sep. 14, 2012, now Pat. No. 8,775,887, which is a continuation of application No. 12/839,129, filed on Jul. 19, 2010, which is a continuation of application

(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 15/00	(2006.01)
G06F 13/00	(2006.01)
G06F 3/0484	(2013.01)
G06Q 10/10	(2012.01)
G06F 17/24	(2006.01)
G06F 21/60	(2013.01)
H04L 12/58	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***G06F 3/0484*** (2013.01); ***G06F 17/241*** (2013.01); ***G06F 21/60*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 10/107*** (2013.01); ***H04L 51/04*** (2013.01); ***H04L 51/046*** (2013.01); ***H04L 51/10*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G06F 3/0484; G06F 17/241

USPC 715/740, 741, 743–744, 751–753, 715/851–853, 761–765, 780

See application file for complete search history.

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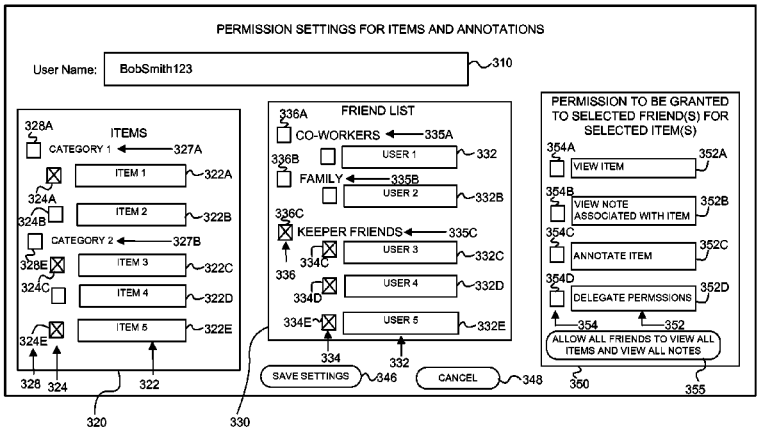
Primary Examiner — Kevin Nguyen
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Keller Jolley Preece

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A user may make a digital item available to other users of a computer network, such as an instant messaging system, a chat environment, or a subscription-based computer network. Examples of digital items that may be shared with other users include digital representations of graphic images, photographs, audio segments, songs, video segments, movies, and text (such as lists of favorites (e.g., a list of favorite books, a list of favorite movies, and a list of favorite places to visit)). On-line presence information is provided to indicate the on-line presence of users with whom a digital item has been shared, may be shared or is being shared. For instance, an indication of the on-line or offline status of a user with whom an item has been shared or is being shared may be presented.

23 Claims, 11 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

No. 11/252,037, filed on Oct. 18, 2005, now Pat. No. 7,783,980, application No. 14/160,210, which is a continuation of application No. 13/947,283, filed on Jul. 22, 2013, now abandoned, which is a continuation of application No. 12/839,129, which is a continuation of application No. 11/252,037.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/668,998, filed on Apr. 7, 2005.

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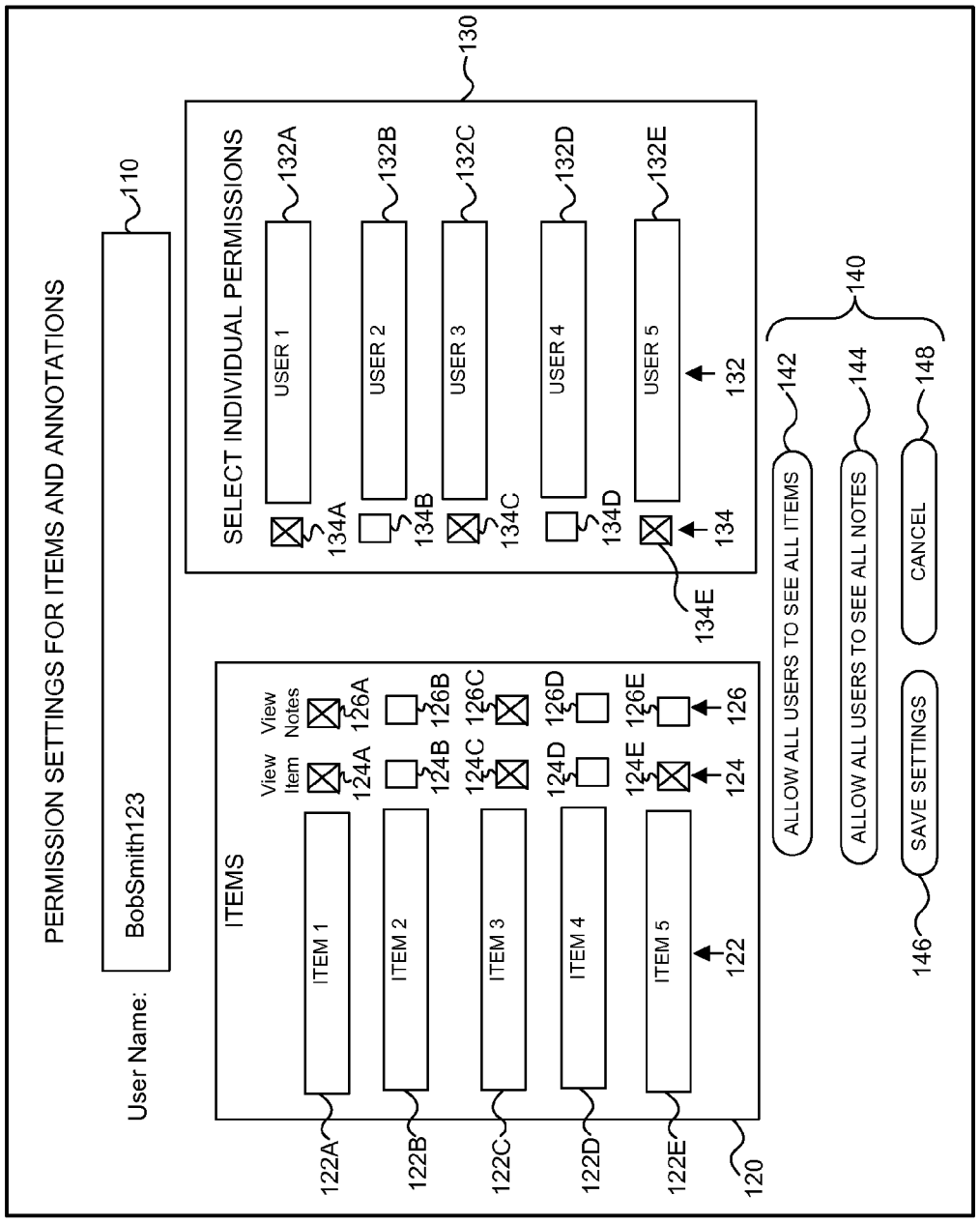
100
PERMISSION SETTINGS FOR ITEMS AND ANNOTATIONS
User Name:
BobSmith123
110
ITEMS
View Item
View Notes
ITEM 1
ITEM 2
ITEM 3
ITEM 4
ITEM 5
122
124
126
122A
122B
122C
122D
122E
120
124A
124B
124C
124D
124E
126A
126B
126C
126D
126E
SELECT INDIVIDUAL PERMISSIONS
130
USER 1
USER 2
USER 3
USER 4
USER 5
132
132A
132B
132C
132D
132E
134A
134B
134C
134D
134E
134
ALLOW ALL USERS TO SEE ALL ITEMS
142
ALLOW ALL USERS TO SEE ALL NOTES
144
140
SAVE SETTINGS
146
CANCEL
148

FIG. 1

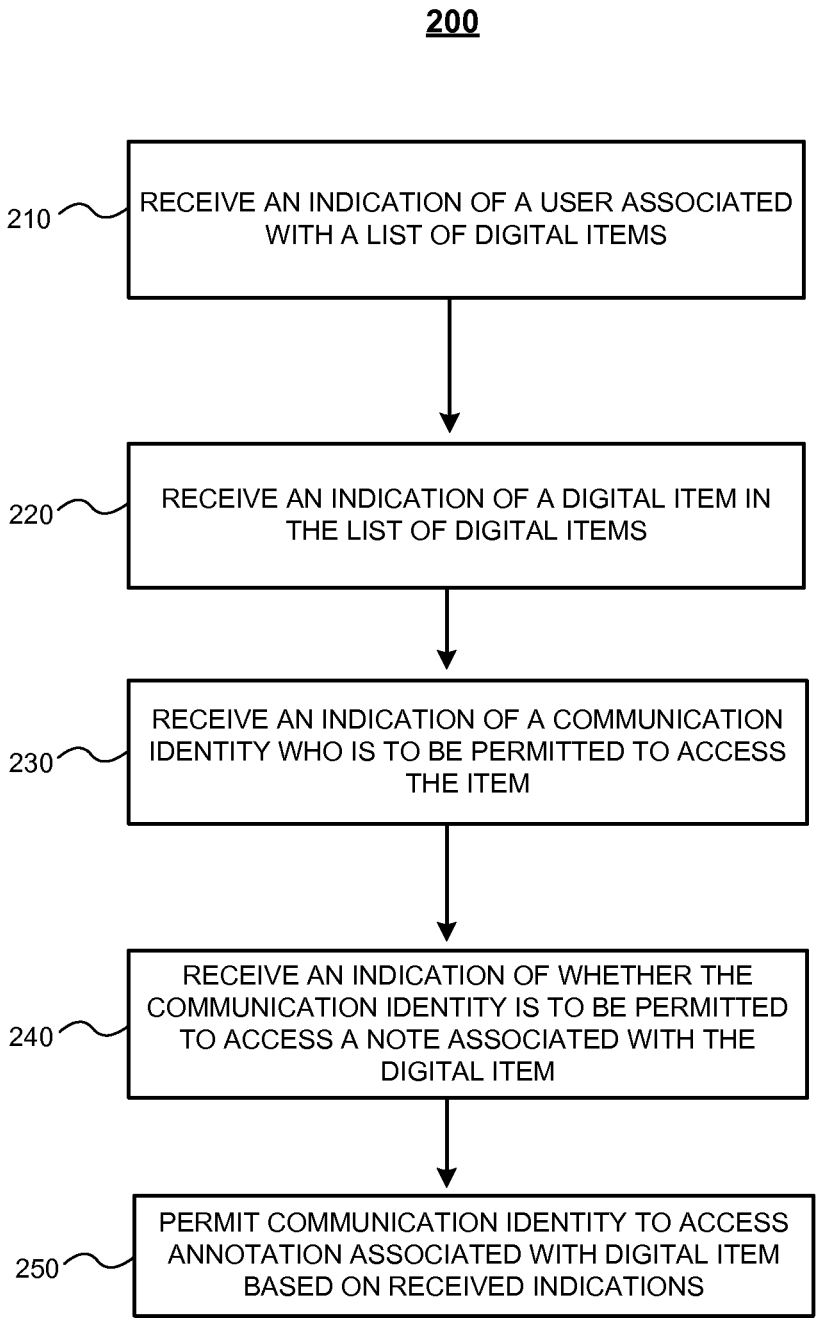
200
210
RECEIVE AN INDICATION OF A USER ASSOCIATED WITH A LIST OF DIGITAL ITEMS
220
RECEIVE AN INDICATION OF A DIGITAL ITEM IN THE LIST OF DIGITAL ITEMS
230
RECEIVE AN INDICATION OF A COMMUNICATION IDENTITY WHO IS TO BE PERMITTED TO ACCESS THE ITEM
240
RECEIVE AN INDICATION OF WHETHER THE COMMUNICATION IDENTITY IS TO BE PERMITTED TO ACCESS A NOTE ASSOCIATED WITH THE DIGITAL ITEM
250
PERMIT COMMUNICATION IDENTITY TO ACCESS ANNOTATION ASSOCIATED WITH DIGITAL ITEM BASED ON RECEIVED INDICATIONS

FIG. 2

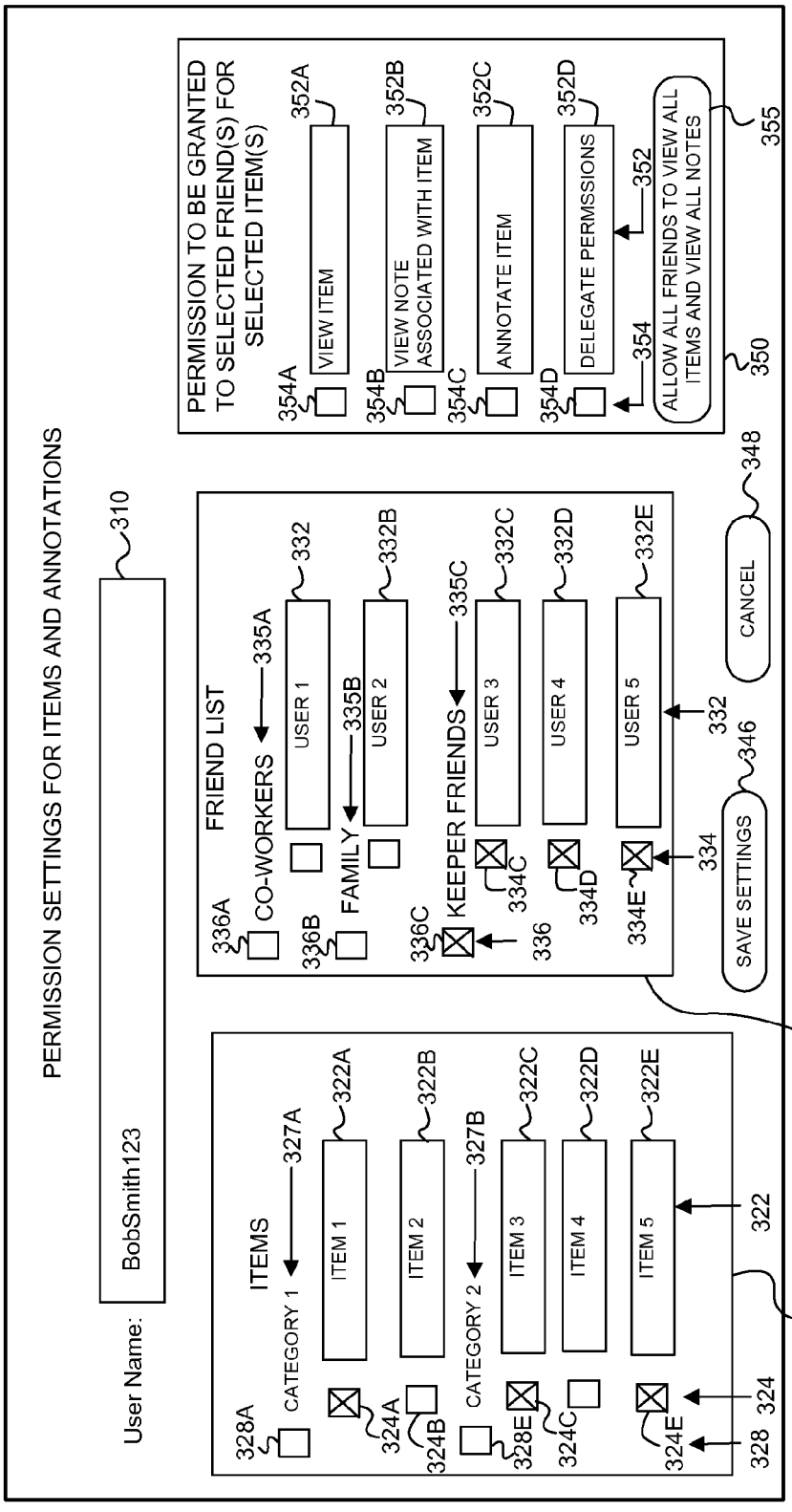
300
PERMISSION SETTINGS FOR ITEMS AND ANNOTATIONS
User Name:
BobSmith123
310
ITEMS
CATEGORY 1
327A
ITEM 1
322A
ITEM 2
322B
CATEGORY 2
327B
ITEM 3
322C
ITEM 4
322D
ITEM 5
322E
322
320
328A
324A
324B
328
324
328E
324C
324E
FRIEND LIST
336A
CO-WORKERS
335A
USER 1
332
336B
FAMILY
335B
USER 2
332B
336C
KEEPER FRIENDS
335C
USER 3
332C
334C
USER 4
332D
334D
336
USER 5
332E
334E
334
332
330
SAVE SETTINGS
346
CANCEL
348
PERMISSION TO BE GRANTED TO SELECTED FRIEND(S) FOR SELECTED ITEM(S)
354A
VIEW ITEM
352A
354B
VIEW NOTE ASSOCIATED WITH ITEM
352B
354C
ANNOTATE ITEM
352C
354D
DELEGATE PERMSSIONS
352D
354
352
ALLOW ALL FRIENDS TO VIEW ALL ITEMS AND VIEW ALL NOTES
350
355

FIG. 3

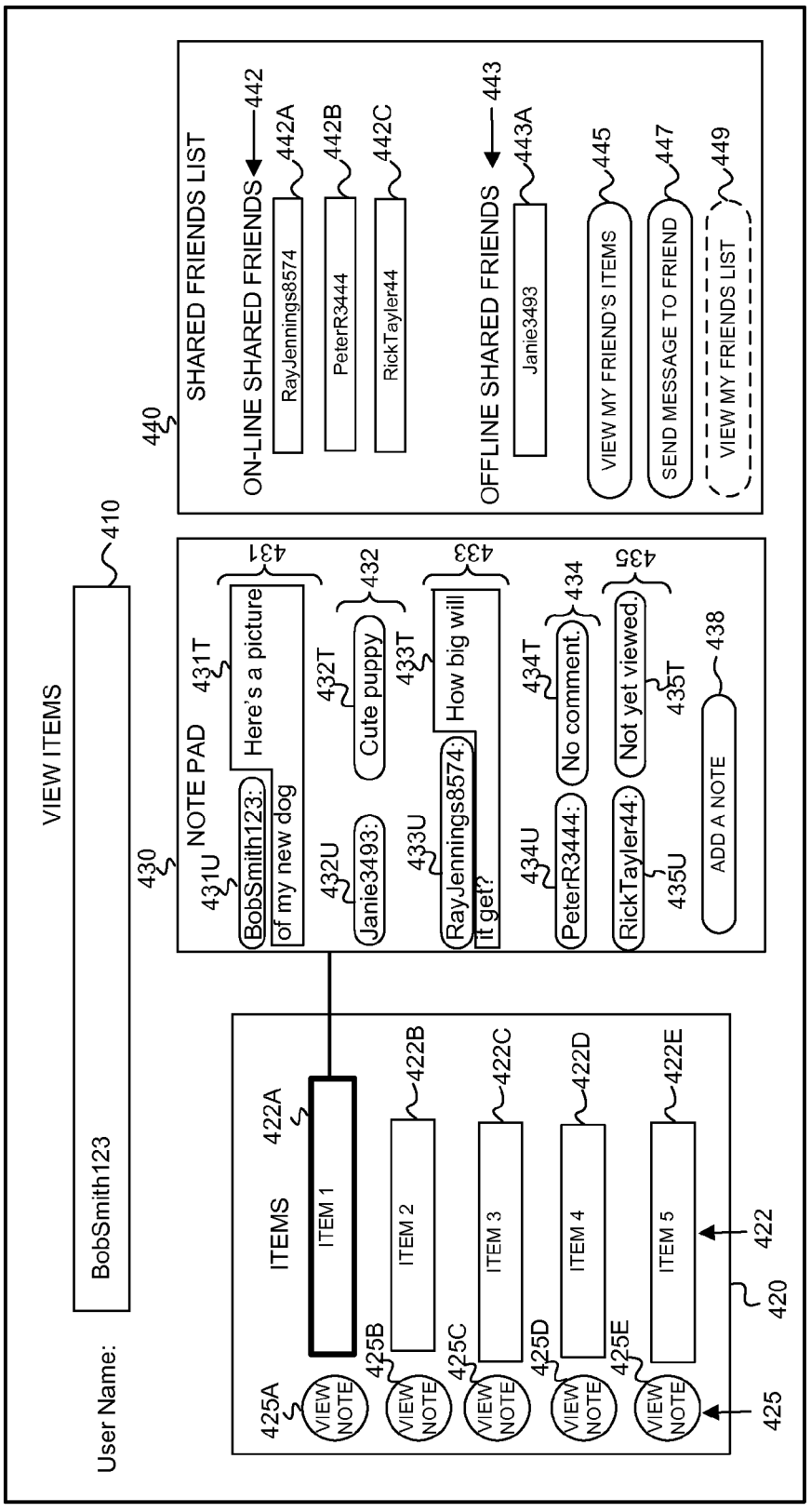
400
VIEW ITEMS
410
User Name:
BobSmith123
430
ITEMS
422A
ITEM 1
ITEM 2
ITEM 3
ITEM 4
ITEM 5
422B
422C
422D
422E
422
420
425
425A
425B
425C
425D
425E
VIEW NOTE
NOTE PAD
431U
431T
BobSmith123:
Here's a picture of my new dog
431
432U
Janie3493:
432T
Cute puppy
432
433U
RayJennings8574:
433T
How big will it get?
433
434U
PeterR3444:
434T
No comment.
434
435U
RickTayler44:
435T
Not yet viewed.
435
ADD A NOTE
438
440
SHARED FRIENDS LIST
ON-LINE SHARED FRIENDS
442
442A
RayJennings8574
442B
PeterR3444
442C
RickTayler44
OFFLINE SHARED FRIENDS
443
443A
Janie3493
VIEW MY FRIEND'S ITEMS
445
SEND MESSAGE TO FRIEND
447
VIEW MY FRIENDS LIST
449

FIG. 4

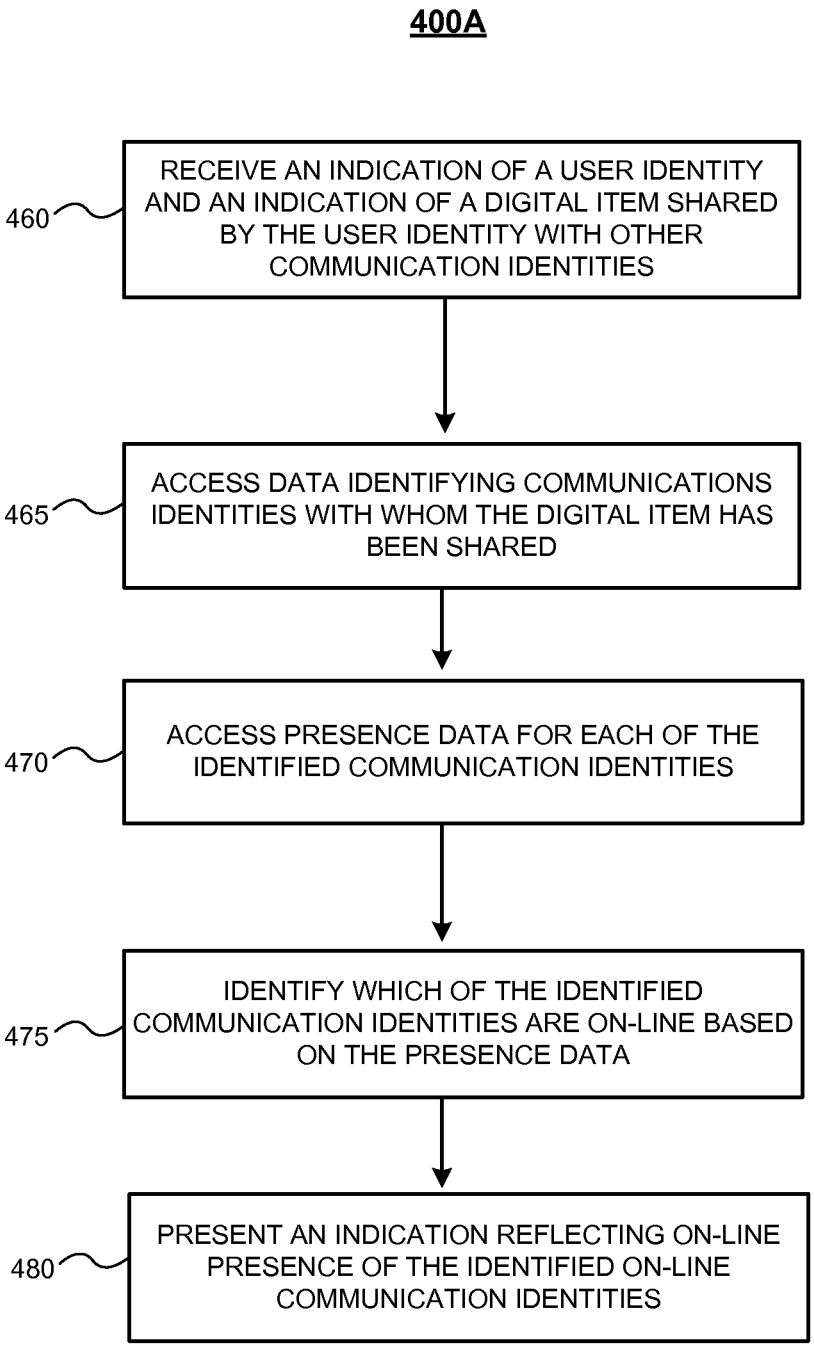
400A
460
RECEIVE AN INDICATION OF A USER IDENTITY AND AN INDICATION OF A DIGITAL ITEM SHARED BY THE USER IDENTITY WITH OTHER COMMUNICATION IDENTITIES
465
ACCESS DATA IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATIONS IDENTITIES WITH WHOM THE DIGITAL ITEM HAS BEEN SHARED
470
ACCESS PRESENCE DATA FOR EACH OF THE IDENTIFIED COMMUNICATION IDENTITIES
475
IDENTIFY WHICH OF THE IDENTIFIED COMMUNICATION IDENTITIES ARE ON-LINE BASED ON THE PRESENCE DATA
480
PRESENT AN INDICATION REFLECTING ON-LINE PRESENCE OF THE IDENTIFIED ON-LINE COMMUNICATION IDENTITIES

FIG. 4A

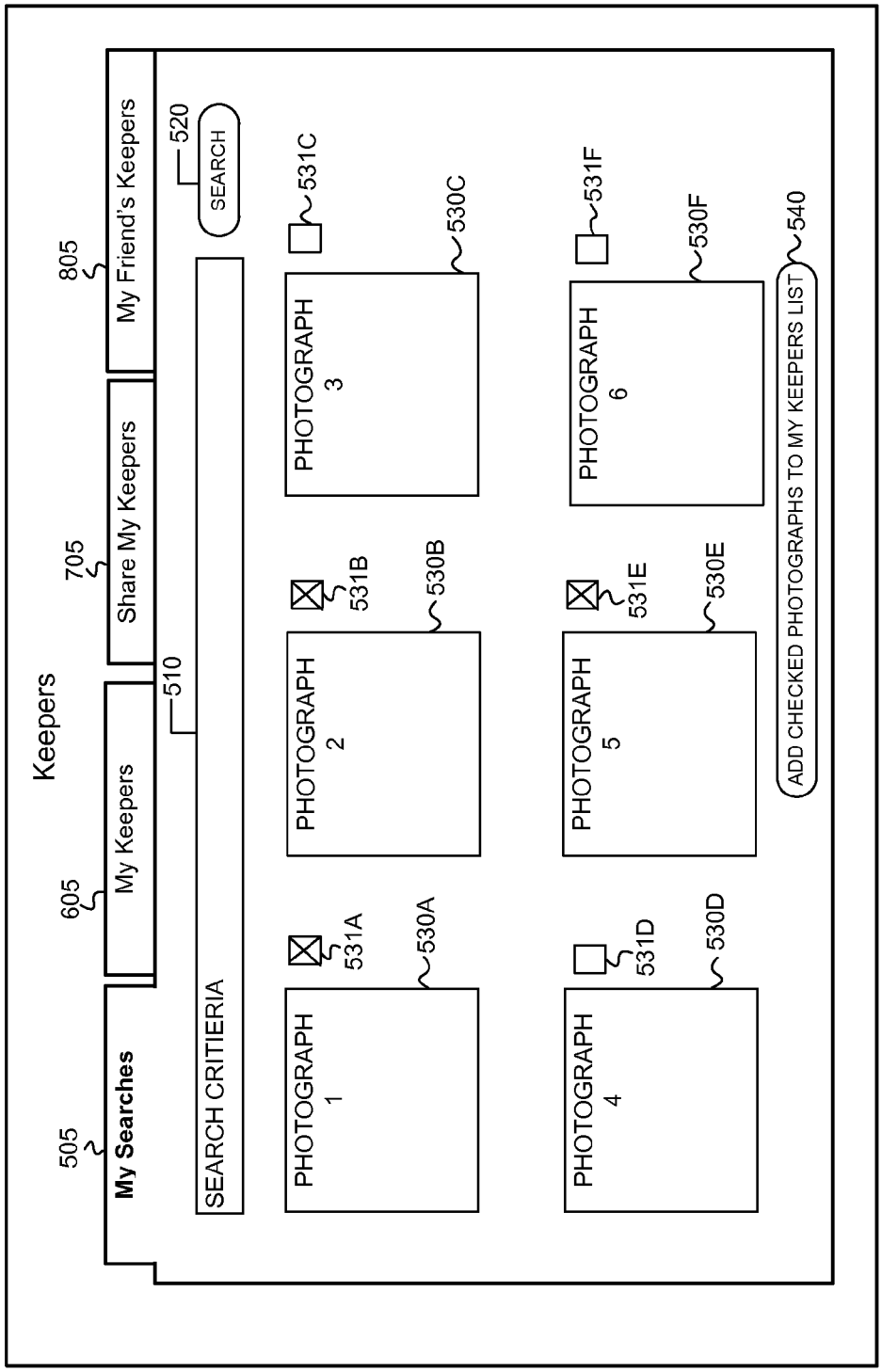
500
Keepers
505
My Searches
605
My Keepers
705
Share My Keepers
805
My Friend's Keepers
510
SEARCH CRITIERIA
520
SEARCH
PHOTOGRAPH 1
531A
530A
PHOTOGRAPH 2
531B
530B
PHOTOGRAPH 3
531C
530C
PHOTOGRAPH 4
531D
530D
PHOTOGRAPH 5
531E
530E
PHOTOGRAPH 6
531F
530F
ADD CHECKED PHOTOGRAPHS TO MY KEEPERS LIST
540

FIG. 5

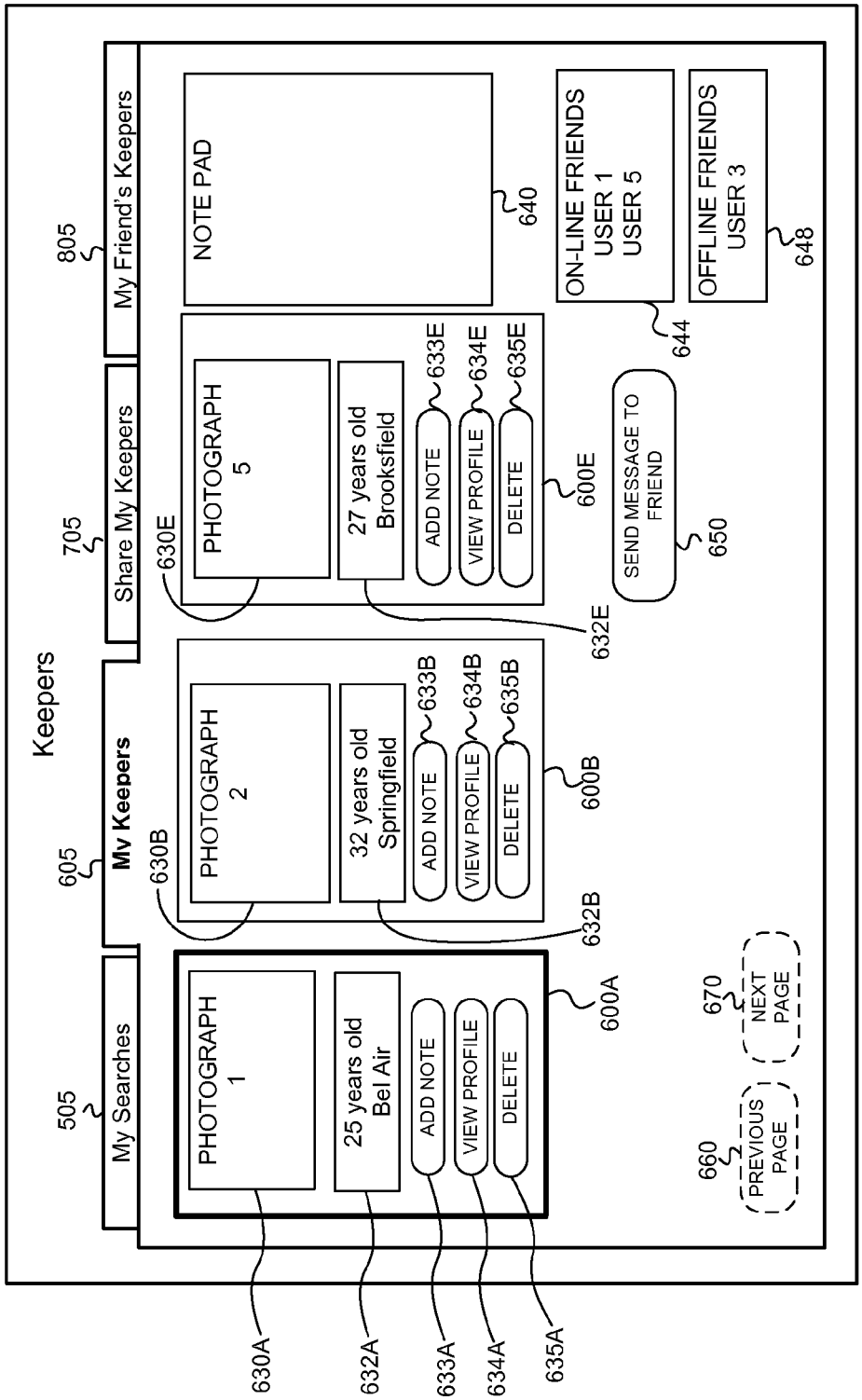
600
Keepers
505
My Searches
605
My Keepers
705
Share My Keepers
805
My Friend's Keepers
PHOTOGRAPH 1
25 years old Bel Air
ADD NOTE
VIEW PROFILE
DELETE
600A
630A
632A
633A
634A
635A
630B
PHOTOGRAPH 2
32 years old Springfield
633B
634B
635B
600B
632B
630E
PHOTOGRAPH 5
27 years old Brooksfield
633E
634E
635E
600E
632E
NOTE PAD
640
SEND MESSAGE TO FRIEND
650
ON-LINE FRIENDS
USER 1
USER 5
644
OFFLINE FRIENDS
USER 3
648
660
PREVIOUS PAGE
670
NEXT PAGE

FIG. 6

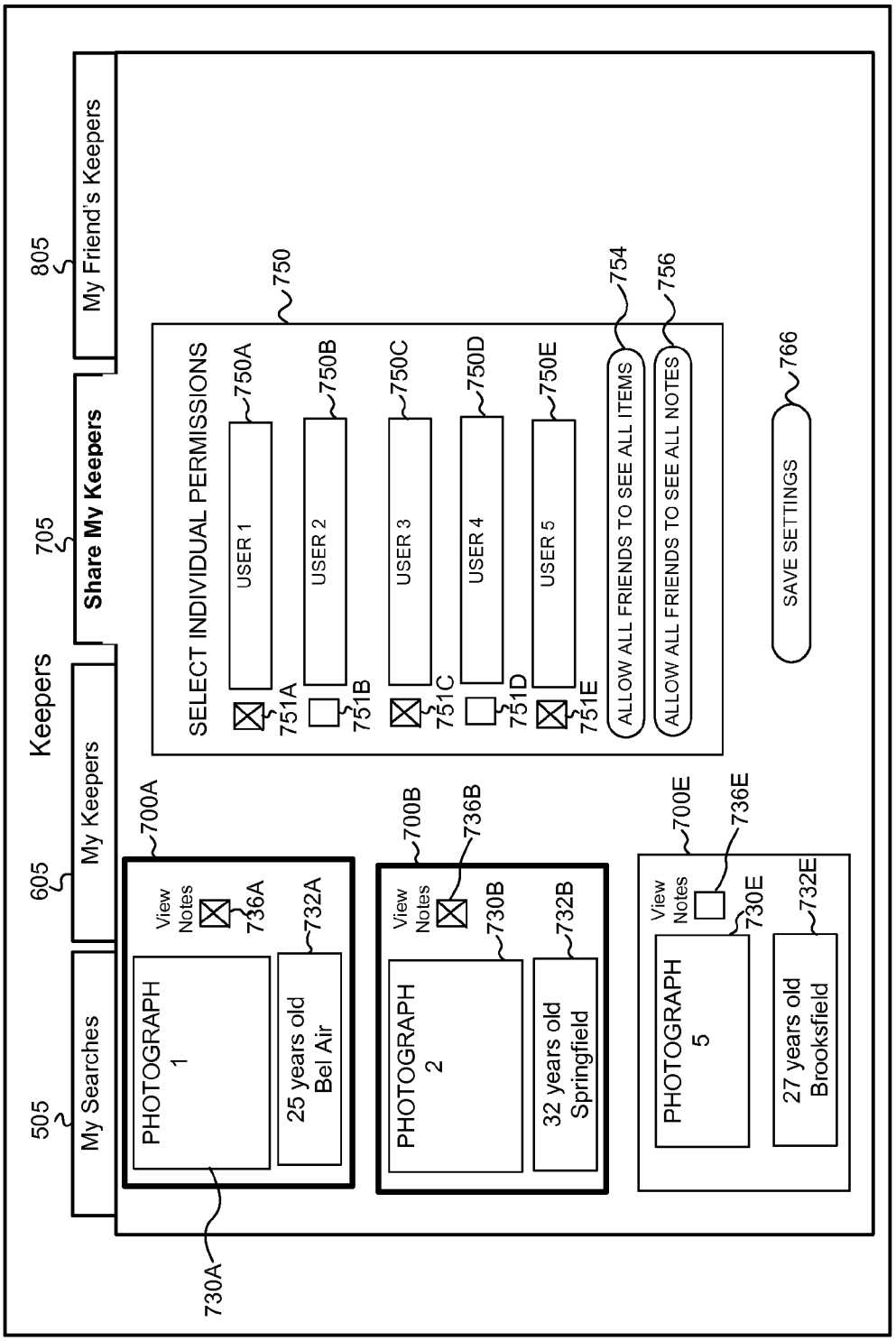
700
505
My Searches
605
My Keepers
Keepers
705
Share My Keepers
805
My Friend's Keepers
730A
700A
PHOTOGRAPH 1
View Notes
736A
732A
25 years old Bel Air
700B
736B
PHOTOGRAPH 2
View Notes
730B
732B
32 years old Springfield
700E
736E
PHOTOGRAPH 5
View Notes
730E
732E
27 years old Brooksfield
SELECT INDIVIDUAL PERMISSIONS
750
USER 1
750A
751A
USER 2
750B
751B
USER 3
750C
751C
USER 4
750D
751D
USER 5
750E
751E
ALLOW ALL FRIENDS TO SEE ALL ITEMS
754
ALLOW ALL FRIENDS TO SEE ALL NOTES
756
SAVE SETTINGS
766

FIG. 7

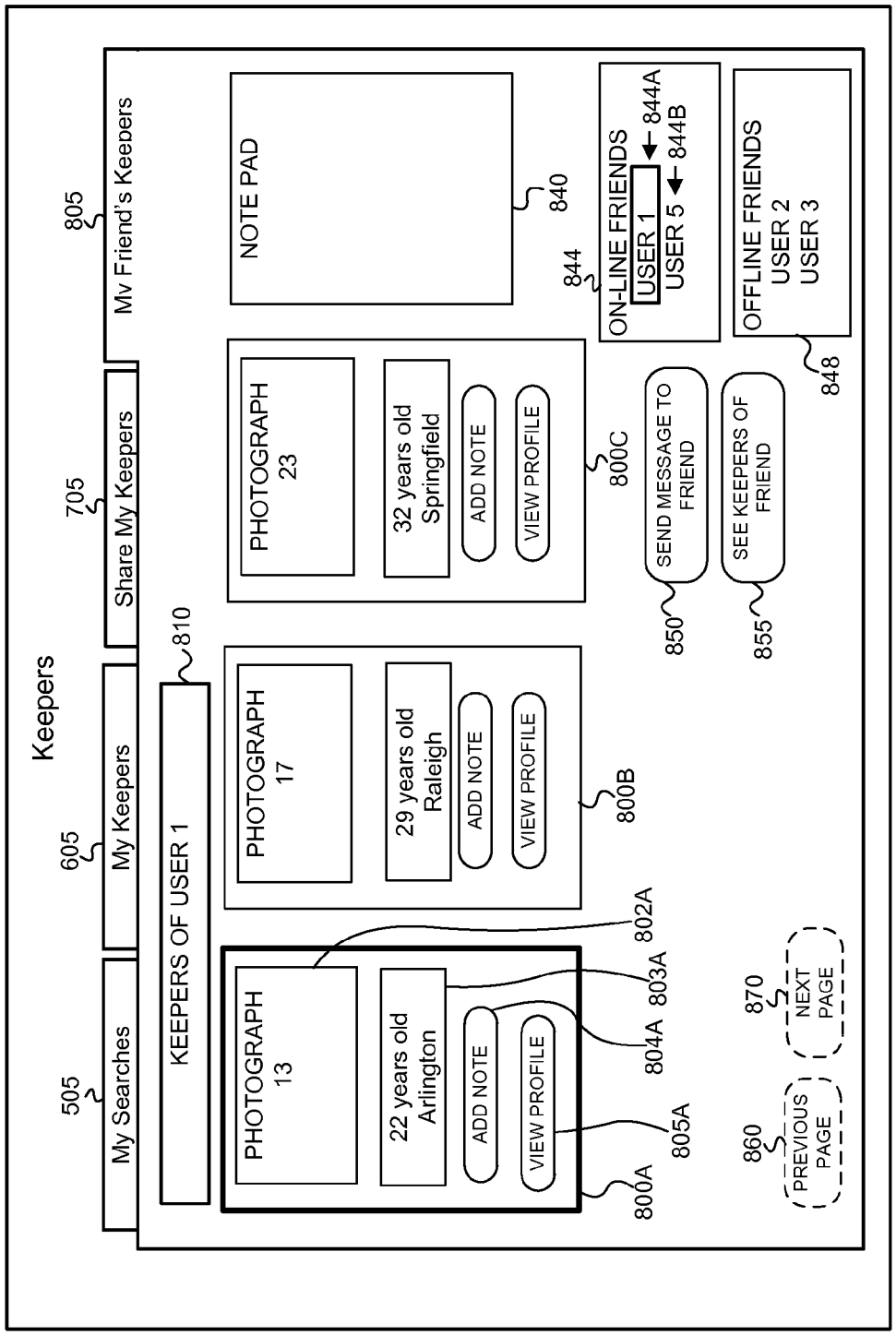
800
Keepers
505
My Searches
605
My Keepers
705
Share My Keepers
805
Mv Friend's Keepers
810
KEEPERS OF USER 1
PHOTOGRAPH 13
22 years old Arlington
ADD NOTE
VIEW PROFILE
800A
802A
803A
804A
805A
PHOTOGRAPH 17
29 years old Raleigh
ADD NOTE
VIEW PROFILE
800B
PHOTOGRAPH 23
32 years old Springfield
ADD NOTE
VIEW PROFILE
800C
NOTE PAD
840
844
ON-LINE FRIENDS
USER 1
USER 5
844A
844B
OFFLINE FRIENDS
USER 2
USER 3
848
SEND MESSAGE TO FRIEND
850
SEE KEEPERS OF FRIEND
855
860
PREVIOUS PAGE
870
NEXT PAGE

FIG. 8

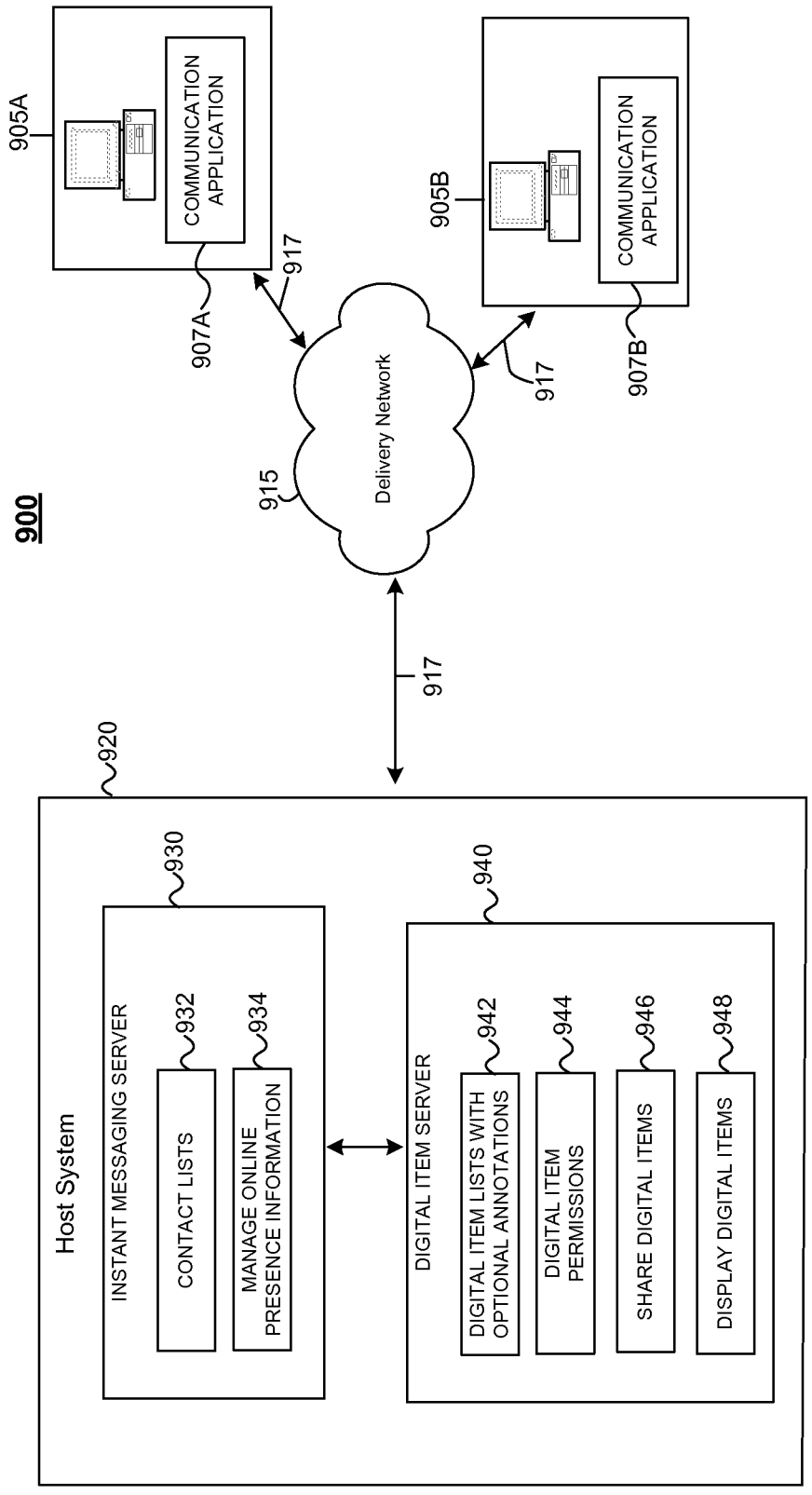
900
905A
COMMUNICATION APPLICATION
907A
917
915
Delivery Network
905B
COMMUNICATION APPLICATION
907B
917
917
920
Host System
INSTANT MESSAGING SERVER
930
CONTACT LISTS
932
MANAGE ONLINE PRESENCE INFORMATION
934
DIGITAL ITEM SERVER
940
DIGITAL ITEM LISTS WITH OPTIONAL ANNOTATIONS
942
DIGITAL ITEM PERMISSIONS
944
SHARE DIGITAL ITEMS
946
DISPLAY DIGITAL ITEMS
948

FIG. 9

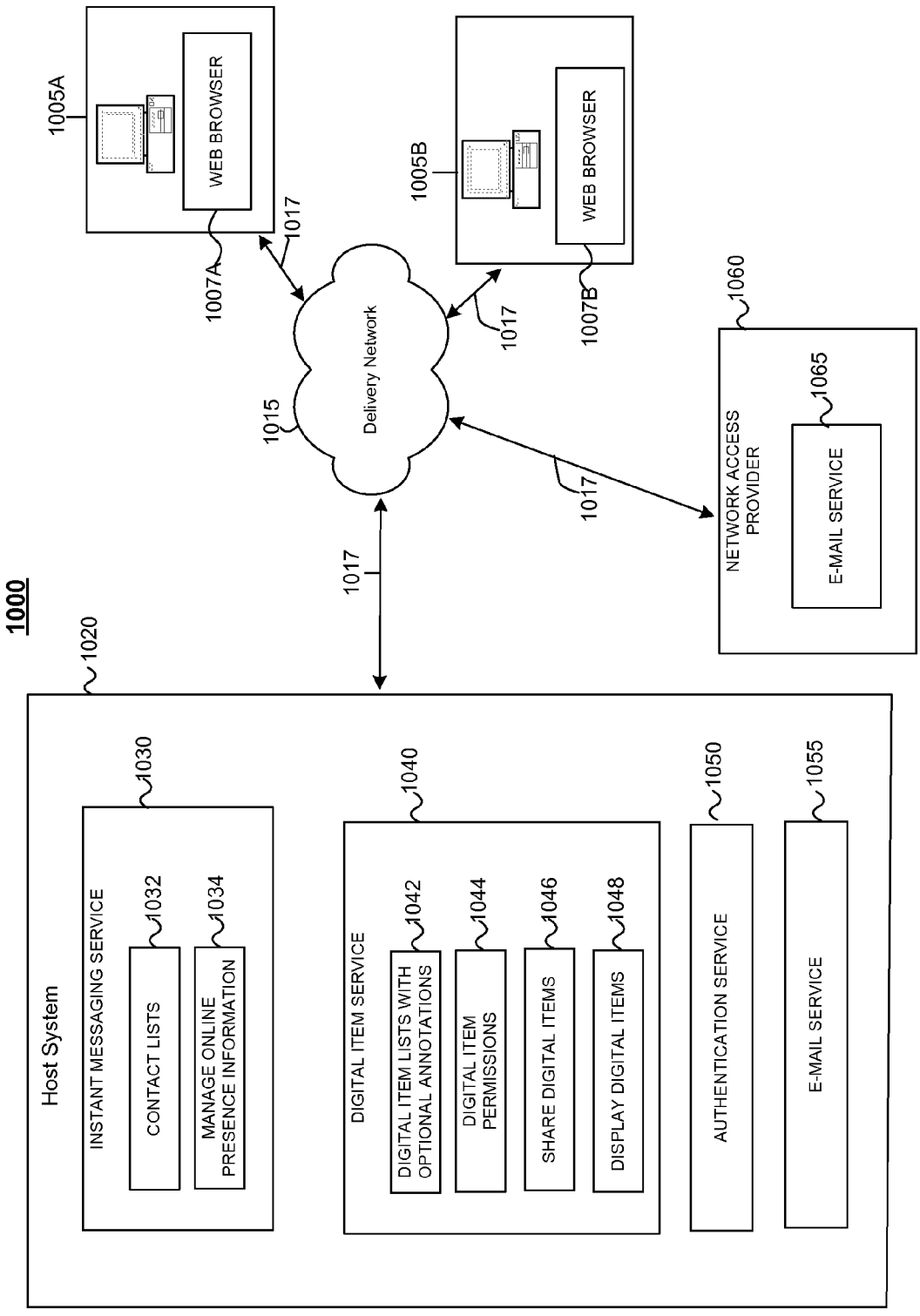
1000
Host System
1020
INSTANT MESSAGING SERVICE
1030
CONTACT LISTS
1032
MANAGE ONLINE PRESENCE INFORMATION
1034
DIGITAL ITEM SERVICE
1040
DIGITAL ITEM LISTS WITH OPTIONAL ANNOTATIONS
1042
DIGITAL ITEM PERMISSIONS
1044
SHARE DIGITAL ITEMS
1046
DISPLAY DIGITAL ITEMS
1048
AUTHENTICATION SERVICE
1050
E-MAIL SERVICE
1055
1017
Delivery Network
1015
1005A
WEB BROWSER
1007A
1005B
WEB BROWSER
1007B
NETWORK ACCESS PROVIDER
1060
E-MAIL SERVICE
1065

FIG. 10

SHARING ANNOTATIONS OF DIGITAL ITEMS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 13/947,283, filed Jul. 22, 2013, and is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 13/619,169, filed Sep. 14, 2012, both of which are continuations of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/839,129, filed Jul. 19, 2010, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 11/252,037, filed Oct. 18, 2005, which is now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,783,980, which claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. provisional application No. 60/668,998, filed Apr. 7, 2005. Each of the aforementioned patent(s) and application(s) are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This description relates to controlling distribution of information related to digital items that are shared with users over a computer network.

BACKGROUND

On-line services may provide users with the ability to send and receive instant messages. Instant messages may be exchanged in a private on-line conversation between two or more people who have access to an instant messaging service and who have installed communications software necessary to access and use the instant messaging service. A participant list that includes the communications identities with which a user exchanges instant messages may be displayed for a user and may be used to establish instant messaging sessions with those other identities. The participant list may indicate whether each identity associated with the participant list is on-line.

SUMMARY

In one general aspect, a graphical user interface on a display device is generated for using a computer to share digital items. The graphical user interface includes an item display and a participant list display. The item display includes digital items, where at least one digital item is associated with a user and also is associated with one or more communication identities to whom the user has granted permission to view the digital item. The participant list display includes the communication identities and presence information associated with the communication identities. The presence information indicates whether a particular communication identity is on-line. The graphical user interface also includes a control element for managing digital items so as to control communications identities to whom access to a digital item is to be provided.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, the participant list display may include a communication identity only when presence information associated with the communication identity reflects that the communication identity is on-line. The participant list display may include a presence indication of whether a communication identity is on-line and may include categories of communication identities such that a category is associated with one or more communications identities.

The participant display may include an on-line category that is associated with one or more on-line communication identities when presence information associated with the one or more on-line communication identities reflects that the one or more communication identities are on-line. The participant display may include an offline category that is associated with one or more offline communication identities when presence information associated with the offline communication identities reflects that the one or more offline communication identities are offline.

The participant display may include a category that is associated with the digital item and the one or more communication identities to whom the user has granted permission to view the digital item. The participant display may include a category that is associated with the digital item and the one or more communication identities to whom the user has granted permission to view the digital item when presence information associated with the communication identity reflects that the one or more communication identities are on-line.

A digital item may be associated with annotation text. A digital item may include, for example, a graphical image, a digitized photograph, an audio segment, a digital video segment, or text. A digital item may include a list of multiple digital items.

In another general aspect, digital items are shared with communication identities by receiving an indication of a digital item that is capable of being accessed over a network of computers and receiving an indication of a communication identity to whom a user has granted permission to view the indicated digital item over the network of computers. An indication is presented to the user of whether the communication identity is currently accessible using the network of computers. The indication is presented in association with the digital item that the communication identity is permitted to view.

Implementations may include one or more of the features noted above and one or more of the following features. For example, an indication may be presented to the user of whether the communication identity is on-line or whether the communication identity is off-line. The user may be an end-user of the network of computers used to present the indication of whether the communication identity is currently accessible using the network of computers.

Implementations of any of the techniques described may include a method or process, an apparatus or system, or computer software on a computer-accessible medium. The details of particular implementations are set forth below. Other features will be apparent from the description and drawings, and from the claims.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIGS. **1** and **3** are diagrams of an exemplary user interface for enabling a user to permit another user access to a digital item and user-entered annotations related to the digital item.

FIG. **2** is a flow chart of a process for indicating whether an annotation associated with a digital item may be shared with another user.

FIG. **4** is a diagram of an exemplary user interface for presenting digital items, annotations related to the digital items, and indications as to whether users who are permitted to access a digital item are on-line.

FIG. **4**A is a flow chart of a process for determining whether a user with whom a digital item has been shared is on-line.

FIGS. **5-8** are diagrams of exemplary user interfaces for enabling a user to permit another user access to a digital item and annotations related to the digital item in the context of an on-line dating application.

FIGS. **9** and **10** are block diagrams of systems capable of allowing sharing of digital items and annotations related to the digital items.

Like reference symbols in the various drawings indicate like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

An instant messaging user may use a participant or contact list that includes a user-selected list of potential instant messaging recipients ("friends") to identify another instant messaging user with whom instant messages are to be exchanged. The participant or contact list may be referred to as a friends list. An instant messaging user also may use a friends list for other purposes, such as to indicate which friends are permitted to access digital items and annotations related to digital items that are associated with the user and accessible through a network of computer systems.

More particularly, techniques are described for user-controlled annotation and sharing of digital items and presentation of on-line presence information related to users with whom digital items are shared.

In one general aspect, techniques are described for user-controlled annotation and sharing of one or more digital items. Examples of digital items that may be shared with other users include digital representations of graphic images, photographs, audio segments, songs, video segments, movies, and text (such as lists of favorites (e.g., a list of favorite books, a list of favorite movies, and a list of favorite places to visit)). A user may make a digital item available to other users of a computer network, such as an instant messaging system, a chat environment, or a subscription-based computer network (such as a network provided by an Internet service provider (ISP)).

In one example, a user of the computer network may load a digital representation of a photograph or an audio segment onto the computer network to make the digital item available to others. For instance, a user may load personal photographs or video segments to share with the user's friends. In another example, a user may select one or more digital items that are available through the computer network to share with other users. For instance, a user may select photographs from an on-line dating application to share with the user's friends, or a user may select songs from an on-line music collection to share with the user's friends.

The user who made the digital item available may be referred to as the owner of the digital item. Similarly, a user who made a collection or list of digital items available may be referred to as the owner of the collection or list of digital items.

User-entered annotations, such as textual comments, may be associated with a digital item, and the owner of the digital item can select which other users can view and/or change all, or some, of the annotations. In some implementations, the owner also may be able to share a link that enables a user who accesses the link to join a chat or instant messaging (IM) session regarding one or more digital items. Additionally or alternatively, the owner may control whether users with whom items have been shared may delegate authority to other users to annotate and/or view all or some of the shared items.

The described techniques may be applicable to the context of on-line dating. For example, a user may like to share his or her hit lists or favorite dating prospects with other users and solicit input from the other users. More particularly, in the context of an on-line dating application or service, a user may create a list of prospects, favorites, or "keepers" from a larger collection of dating prospects generally available to users of the on-line dating application. The user is given the opportunity to share the list with other users and to solicit comments about the entries in the list. The user can administratively select whether the other users' comments will be seen by all with whom the list is shared or only by the sharing user. Other users may access the shared list and may be provided with an electronic notepad (or other type of mechanism) through which to annotate individual entries in the shared list.

In another general aspect, on-line presence information is provided to indicate the on-line presence of users with whom a digital item has been shared, may be shared or is being shared. For instance, an indication of the on-line or offline status of a user with whom an item has been shared or is being shared may be presented.

FIG. **1** shows an exemplary graphical user interface **100** for enabling a user to permit another user to access a digital item and user-entered annotations related to the digital item. An annotation also may be referred to as a note or a comment. An annotation that is related to a digital item also may be referred to as an annotation that is associated with a digital item or as an annotation that corresponds to a digital item.

The user interface **100** includes a user indicator **110** that identifies the user identity (i.e., "BobSmith123") of the user who is the owner of the list of digital items displayed in the user interface **100**. Typically, the user to whom the user interface **100** is displayed is the user identified in the user indicator **110**. The user indicator **110** may display a screen name, a user name, a user identifier, or another type of user indicator to identify the user identity. A user identity also may be referred to as a communication identity. Typically, the user identity is an end-user of the computer network and is not a system administrator of the computer network or a data management system (such as a commercially available relational or object-oriented relational database management system) with authority or capability to create or modify user account information or to enable or disable access by user identities to the computer network or data management system.

The user interface **100** also includes an items window **120** that displays digital items (or indications thereof) **122** and an identity window **130** that displays user indicators **132**. By manipulating the user interface **100**, a user may indicate that the user identities identified in the identity window **130** are permitted access to digital items and/or notes identified in items window **120**, as described more fully below. The user of the user interface **100** may be the owner of the digital items **122**. In some implementations, the user of the user interface **100** may be a user other than the owner, such as a user who has been granted permission by the owner of the digital items **122** to access the digital items **122** and also grant permission to other users to access the digital items **122**. Indicating that another user may access the item may be referred to as sharing the item with the other user.

More particularly, the items window **120** includes digital items **122** for which the user identified in the user indicator **110** may control which other users may access the digital item and one or more notes that are associated with the digital item. Each of the digital items **122** is identified by an item indicator that shows the name of the digital item (e.g., "ITEM 1" for item **122**A).

The item window **120** also includes item check boxes **124** and notes check boxes **126**. Each of the digital items **122** has a corresponding item check box and a corresponding notes check box. In one example, the item window **120** includes an item check box **124**A and a notes check box **126**A for the item **122**A (i.e., "ITEM 1"). An item check box enables the user to indicate whether other users may view the corresponding digital item. When an item check box corresponding to a

digital item is checked, users identified in the identity window **130** are to be permitted to view the digital item. When an item check box corresponding to an item is not checked, the user identities identified in the identity window **130** are not permitted to view the digital item.

Each of the notes check boxes **126** enables the user interacting with the user interface **100** to indicate whether users identified in identity window **130** are to be permitted to view notes related to the corresponding digital item. When a note check box corresponding to an item is checked, any users identified in the identity window **130** are to be permitted to view a note associated with the item. When a note check box corresponding to an item is not checked, the user identities identified in the identity window **130** are not to be permitted to view the note associated with the item. In some implementations, only users who are permitted to view an item are permitted to view notes associated with the item, although this need not necessarily be so.

The identity window **130** identifies user identities **132** with whom the digital items in item window **120** may be shared. For example, the identity window **130** may present user identities from a friends list or another type of contact list that is associated with the user identified in user indicator **110**. The user identities **132** may be a subset or all of the user identities from the friends list. Alternatively or additionally, the user identities **132** may identify users with whom one or more of the digital items **122** have been shared. A user identity of user identifies **132** may be identified by a screen name, a user name, or another type of user identifier. For convenience, each of the user identities **132** may be referred to as a friend, though the user identities **132** need not necessarily have a personal association with the user identified by user indicator **110**.

The identity window **130** also includes identity check boxes **134**. Each of the user identities **132** has a corresponding identity check box. In one example, the identity window **130** includes an identity check box **134**A for the friend **132**A (i.e., "USER 1"). The user interface **100** enables a user to identify any, some or all of the friends identified in the identity window **130** to which access to the items and/or notes identified in items window **120** is to be permitted. More particularly, when an identity check box **134** corresponding to a user identity **132** is checked, the user identity is to be permitted to view digital items and notes identified in the items window **120**. When an identity check box **134** corresponding to a user identity **132** is not checked, the user identity is not to be permitted to view digital items and notes identified in items window **120**. Other implementations may include separate checkboxes that permit separate indications as to whether a particular user identity may access an item and notes associated with the item.

In the example shown in the user interface **100**, the items **122**A and **122**C (i.e., ITEMS 1 and 3), as well as notes that correspond to ITEMS 1 and 3, are to be shared with the users identified in the identity window **130** because the checkboxes **124**A, **126**A, **124**C and **126**C are checked. The item **122**E (i.e., ITEM 5) is to be shared with the users identified in the identity window **130** and notes associated with ITEM 5 are not to be shared. This is because the item checkbox **124**E is checked, whereas the notes checkbox **126**E is not checked. The items **122**B and **122**D (i.e., ITEMS 2 and 4) are not to be shared, nor are notes that correspond to ITEMS 2 and 4 to be shared. This is because check boxes **124**B, **124**D, **126**B and **126**E are not checked.

More particularly, in this example, users **132**A, **132**C and **132**E (i.e., USERS 1, 3 and 5) are to be permitted to view items **122**A, **122**C and **122**E (i.e., ITEMS 1, 3 and 5) and are to be permitted to view notes corresponding to items **122**A and **122**C (i.e., notes corresponding to ITEMS 1 and 3). No user identities are permitted to view items **122**B and **122**D (i.e., ITEMS 2 or 4) or notes corresponding to items **122**B and **122**D (i.e., notes corresponding to ITEMS 2 and 4). No user identities are permitted to view notes corresponding to item **122**E (i.e. notes corresponding to ITEM 5).

The user interface **100** also includes an all-items control **142** and an all-notes control **144**. The all-items control **142** enables a user of interface **100** to indicate that all user identities **132** listed in the identity window **130** are to be able to view all of the digital items **122** listed in the item window **120**. In one example, the all-items control **142**, when activated, is operable to check (or otherwise activate) all of the identity check boxes **134** and all of the item check boxes **124**.

The all-notes control **144** enables a user to indicate that all user identities **132** listed in the identity window **130** are to be able to view notes that correspond to all of the digital items **122** listed in the items window **120**. In one example, the all-notes control **144**, when activated, is operable to check (or otherwise activate) all of the identity check boxes **134** and all of the notes check boxes **126**. In another example, the all-notes control **144**, when activated, is operable to check (or otherwise activate) all of the identity check boxes **134**, all of the item check boxes **124**, and all of the notes check boxes **126**.

Each of the all-items control **142** and the all-notes control **144** may help reduce the burden of individually identifying users, items and notes. This may be particularly useful when a user wishes to permit a large number of users to access a large number of items and/or notes.

The user interface **100** also includes a save control **146** operable to persistently store indications of the user identities that are permitted to access digital items and/or notes based on the information indicated in the items window **120** and identity window **130**, as described previously, and to remove the user interface **100** from display. An indication of whether a user identity is permitted to access a digital item and/or a note may be referred to as a "permission." For example, the permissions identified may be stored in a database for later use in determining whether a user is permitted to access an item and/or a note related to an item. The user interface **100** also includes a cancel control **148** operable to remove the user interface **100** from display without persistently storing the permissions identified in the user interface **100**.

In some implementations, the user interface **100** may include a reset control operable to display the settings in the items window **120** and the identity window **130** based on persistently stored permissions. Stated differently, the user interface **100** may include a reset control operable to modify checkboxes **124**, **126** and **134** as necessary to represent persistently stored permissions for the user identities identified in identity window **130**. In a more particular example of a reset control, the reset control is operable to set the check boxes **124** and **126** in the items window **120** and the check boxes **134** in the identity window **130** to reflect the stored permissions to the items **122** for the users **132**.

As shown, the user interface **100** enables an owner of a digital item or a list of digital items to control access to the digital items and annotations related to the digital items with a high degree of granularity. For example, the owner of multiple digital items can indicate that some of the owner's friends are permitted to view annotations corresponding to particular digital items, while permitting other of the owner's friends to view the particular digital items without viewing the corresponding annotations. For other digital items, the owner can indicate that all of the owner's friends are permit-

ted to view those particular digital items and the annotations associated with those particular digital items.

FIG. **2** depicts a process **200** for indicating whether an annotation associated with a digital item may be shared with other users. The process **200** may be performed, for example, by a processor on an instant messaging provider system, a processor on a client system running an instant messaging or chat application, or a processor on a client system executing an on-line dating application.

The process **200** begins when a user initiates display of a user interface to control permissions for other users to access digital items and annotations associated with the digital items. For convenience in describing the example of process **200**, the user interacting with the user interface is referred to as the user, whereas the user identity to whom access is to be permitted is referred to as a communication identity. In the example of the process **200**, the user is designated as the owner of a list or other type of collection of digital items.

The processor receives an indication of a user who is the owner of a list of digital items that includes an annotation that is to be shared with a communication identity (step **210**). This may be accomplished, for example, when the processor receives a user identifier (such as a screen name) that corresponds to the user who initiated the display of the user interface and provides user-input for the process **200**. For example, the processor may receive the screen name of the user, where the screen name was identified through a user authentication process performed to grant access to the computer network or to grant access to particular functions available through the computer network (such as an instant messaging, chat or dating application or service). In another example, the user may directly key in or otherwise enter a user identifier using an input device of a computer system.

The processor receives an indication of a digital item in the list of digital items (step **220**), an indication of a communication identity who is permitted to access the indicated digital item (step **230**), and an indication of whether the communication identity is also permitted to view a note associated with the digital item (step **240**). In general, this may be accomplished, for example, when the processor displays a list from which the user selects. In one example, the processor may display a list of digital items from which the user selects a digital item. Once the user selects a digital item, the processor may display a list of communication identities from which the user selects a communication identity. After the user selects a communication identity, the processor may query whether the communication identity is permitted to view the selected item and/or an annotation associated with the selected item.

In another example of the manner in which steps **220**-**240** may be accomplished, the processor may receive indications based on user-input received from a user interface similar to the user interface **100** of FIG. **1**. In a more particular example, the processor may receive an indication of a digital item, such as an identifier identifying a particular digital item (e.g., an identifier that identifies item **122**A of FIG. **1**) when the check box corresponding to the item indicates a user is to be permitted to view the item (e.g., when check box **124**A of FIG. **1** is checked). The processor also may receive an indication of whether a user is to be permitted to view a note related to the item (e.g., an indication of whether the notes check box **126**A is checked). The processor may receive an indication of the communication identity, such as a screen name or other type of user identifier, when the corresponding identity check box is checked (e.g., screen name for user **134**A is provided when identity check box **134**A is checked).

After receiving indications of a digital item, a communication identity and whether the communication identity is permitted to access an annotation that is associated with the indicated digital item, the processor permits the indicated communication identity to access the annotation related to the indicated digital item conditioned on receiving an indication that the communication identity is permitted to access the annotation (step **250**). This may be accomplished, for example, by persistently storing in a data structure an indication of permission for the communication identity to view an annotation associated with the indicated digital item. For example, a data structure may associate the indication of the communication identity, the indication of the digital item (such as an identifier for a particular digital item), and an indication that the communication identity is permitted to view a note or notes associated with the digital item. In some implementations, the permission may be granted only for the current communication session, and, if so, the permission may be transiently stored in lieu of being persistently stored.

In some implementations, the processor also may receive and store an indication of delegation of authority to the communication identity to permit the communication identity, in turn, to enable other communication identities access to the digital item and/or notes associated with the item. The delegation may be later used to permit the user to enable other users to access the digital item and/or annotations associated with the digital item.

The process **200**, or portions thereof, may be used to permit multiple communication identities access to an annotation associated with a digital item. The process **200**, or portions thereof, also may be used to permit a communication identity access to multiple annotations where an annotation is associated with a digital item.

FIG. **3** depicts another exemplary graphical user interface **300** for setting permissions to control the sharing of one or more digital items and user-entered notes related to the digital items with other users. In contrast to the user interface **100** of FIG. **1**, the user interface **300** enables a user to indicate whether communication identities may create notes for the items in the list and to delegate authority to communication identities to allow still other communication identities to view and/or annotate the shared items. In general, the user indicates which items to share and with whom to share the items using the controls in items window **320** and identity window **330**, respectively. The user indicates how the indicated items are be shared with the indicated users by selecting controls in permissions settings window **350**.

The user interface **300** includes a user indicator **310** that identifies the user identity of the owner of the digital items for which permissions are to be set. The user indicator **310** may be an implementation of the user indicator **110** of FIG. **1**.

The user interface **300** also includes the items window **320** that displays digital items **322** and item check boxes **324** for each of the digital items **322**. In contrast with the example shown in interface **100**, the items **322** are grouped into one or more user-defined or pre-selected groups or categories **327**A and **327**B (collectively, "categories"). As shown, items **322**A and **322**B are grouped into category **327**A (i.e., CATEGORY 1), and items **322**C-**322**E are grouped into category **327**B (i.e., CATEGORY 2).

The items window **320** also includes category-selector check boxes **328**. The user may indicate that all of the digital items within a category are to be shared by selecting the category-selector check box corresponding to the category. For example, an indication that items **322**A and **322**B are to be shared may be made by checking (or otherwise activating) category-selector check box **328**A, which corresponds to the category **327**A. In some implementations, checking category-selector check box **328**A may cause item check boxes

324A and 324B to appear checked or otherwise selected, though this may not necessarily be so.

Alternatively or additionally, the user may select or de-select individual items by selecting or de-selecting an item checkbox of checkboxes 324, which corresponds to the item to be selected or de-selected. The ability to select all items in a category and de-select previously selected individual items may be useful, for example, when a user desires to share many (but not all) of a large number of items in a category.

The user interface 300 also includes an identity window 330. In contrast to the identity window 130 of FIG. 1, friends 332 are grouped into one or more user-defined or pre-selected groups or categories ("groups") within the friends window 330. As shown, the identity window 330 has three groups, Co-workers 335A, Family 335B and Keeper Friends 335C. User 332A belongs to the Co-workers group 335A, user 332B belongs to the Family group 335B, and users 332C-332E belong to the Keeper Friends group 335C. All friends in a group may be selected by checking (or otherwise activating) a group-identity checkbox 336A, 336B or 336C that corresponds to the group of friends to be permitted access. To individually indicate a friend with whom to share the digital items selected in item window 320, a user selects the identity check box 334 that corresponds to a friend to be selected. In the example shown in user interface 300, the group-identity check box 336C is checked, which results in each of the identity check boxes 334C-334E being checked. The identity check boxes 334C-334E correspond to the friends 332C-332E, respectively.

The user interface 300 also includes the permissions setting window 350. The user may indicate permissions settings for the items selected in item box 320 to be provided to the friends selected in an identity s window 330. The permission settings window 350 includes controls 354 to indicate that the friends are, for example, permitted to perform actions 352 for the items identified in the items window 322.

More particularly, a user is able to indicate that friends identified in identity window 330 are able to view the items identified in item window 320 by selecting check box 354A for permission setting 352A (i.e., view item). The user is able to indicate that friends identified in the identity window 330 are able to view a note or notes related to the items identified in item window 320 by selecting check box 354B for permission setting 352B (i.e., view note associated with item). The user is able to indicate that friends identified in the identity window 330 are able to annotate the items identified in item window 320 by selecting check box 354C for permission setting 352C (i.e., annotate item). The user is able to indicate that friends identified in the identity window 330 are able to delegate permissions for the items identified in item window 320 by selecting check box 354D for permission setting 352D (i.e., delegate permissions).

In some implementations, one or more combinations of permissions may not be permitted. For example, in some implementations, a user may be required to be permitted to view a note associated with an item (permission 352B) in order to be able to annotate the item (permission 352C). In another example, a user may be permitted to delegate authority only of the same type of authority that the user has. For example, the user may be permitted to delegate viewing annotations for a digital item only when the user is permitted to view the annotations for a digital item—that is, the user may not be able to delegate viewing annotations for a digital item when the user is not permitted to view annotations for the digital item.

Once the user owner has indicated which permissions, if any to grant, by selecting one or more of check boxes 354A-354D, the user may grant the particular permissions indicated by permissions setting window 350 to the friends selected in identity window 330 for the items selected in the items box 320 by activating (such as by using a pointing device to click) the save settings control 346. The user interface 300 may be removed from display without granting any permissions by activating the cancel control 348. Alternatively, the user may allow all of the users in identities window 330 to view all of the items in the digital list shown in the items box 320 and any associated notes by activating the all-friends control 355.

In some implementations, a user interface for setting permissions may include multiple windows, such as where windows are serially presented. For example, when a user selects an item or a category presented in a window, the friends list is presented in another window (such as a pop-up window), and when a user is selected from the friends list, a list of permissions is presented in yet another window.

FIG. 4 shows an exemplary user interface 400 for enabling an owner of a list of digital items to view the notes that other users have made for the digital items. The user interface 400 also allows the user to view which friends with whom an item has been shared, is being shared, or may be shared are currently on-line, and which friends are currently off-line. The owner of the item may also use the user interface 400 to annotate (or add notes) corresponding to digital items. Other users may be allowed to view and/or create annotations of items in the owner's list once the owner gives the other user permission to view, and/or make annotations to the item, respectively.

The user interface 400 includes a user indicator 410 that displays the user identity of the owner of the digital items. The items window 420 displays the digital items. As shown in this example, the digital item itself is able to be displayed in the item window 422. Alternatively or additionally, an item identifier or indicator may be displayed in the item window 422 and, upon activation of the item identifier or indicator, the item itself is displayed and/or started (such as by playing an audio segment or playing a video segment). In some instances, a portion of a digital item may be displayed in item window 422, and another portion of the digital item may be displayed outside of window 422 or started based on user-initiated action or occurrence of a pre-determined condition (such as when the portion of the digital item displayed in item window 422 is selected by a pointing device or after a predetermined period of time has passed).

The items window 420 also includes a view-note control for each item. In this example, 425A, 425B, 425C, 425D or 425E are the view-note controls for the items in the items box 420. When one of the view-note controls is activated or selected, the note pad 430 shows notes associated with the corresponding one of items 422A-422E. In the example shown in the user interface 400, the view-note control 425A is activated and the notes associated with item 422A are displayed in the note pad 430.

The note pad 430 includes user-entered notes 431-433. Each of notes 431-433 includes a portion that identifies the user identifier for the user who entered the note and a portion that identifies the annotation itself (here, the annotation is a textual note). This or other implementations may support other types of data in annotations, such as graphic images, photographs, audio segments, and/or video segments. More particularly, note 431 includes a user identifier 431U and an annotation 431T; note 432 includes a user identifier 432U and an annotation 432T; and note 433 includes a user identifier 433U and an annotation 433T. The users identified by user identifier 432U and 433U each are permitted to enter annotations for item 422A.

The note pad **430** also indicates whether users with permission to view and/or annotate the item have viewed and/or annotated the item, as shown by programmatically generated notes **434** and **435**. In this example, permitted-user "PeterR3444" (identified by the user identifier **434**U) has viewed but has not commented on item **422**A, as indicated by **434**T (i.e., "No comment."). Permitted-user "RickTayler44" (identified by the user identifier **435**U) has not viewed or commented on item **422**A, as indicated by **435**T (i.e., "Not yet viewed."). The note pad **430** also includes a control **438** that allows the user of interface **400** to add a note about the item selected in the item window **420**.

The exemplary user interface **400** also includes a shared-friends window **440**. The shared-friends window **440** displays the user identifiers **442**A, **442**B, **442**C and **443**A of friends with whom the item selected in item window **420** has been shared or is being shared. The shared-friends window **440** indicates whether each of the friends is on-line or off-line.

More particularly, the shared-friends window **440** includes an on-line group **442** and an off-line group **443**. The on-line group **442** includes friends **442**A, **442**B and **442**C, all of whom are currently on-line, whereas the off-line group **443** includes friend **443**A, who is not currently on-line. In another example of indicating whether a friend with whom an item has been shared is on-line or off-line, an icon may be shown adjacent to the friend's user identifier to indicate whether the friend is on-line or off-line. In yet another example, only on-line friends may be listed in a shared-friends window **440**.

The ability to see what friends with whom an item has been or is being shared are on-line may be desirable. For example, the user may desire to start a dialogue with one of the friends with whom the item has been shared and may be able to initiate communications more conveniently when presence information about the friend's online status is available.

The shared-friends window **440** also includes a control **445** (i.e., VIEW MY FRIEND'S ITEMS) that is operable to enable a user to view the items that have been shared by a friend with the user. This may be accomplished, for example, by augmenting the item window **422** to include items that are owned by a friend of the user (rather than owned by the user) and have been shared with the user (e.g., the augmented items are presented in the item window **420** in addition to the items **422**A-**422**E owned by the user). In another example, the item window **422** may include only items that have been shared with the user (e.g., the items **422**A-**422**E are replaced by the items shared with the user).

The shared-friends window **440** also includes a control **447** operable to enable a user to send a message to one of the friends who is on-line. This may be accomplished, for example, by displaying an instant message communication interface that enables a user to send an instant message.

FIG. **4**A is an illustration of a process **400**A for determining whether a user with whom a digital item has been shared is on-line. The process **400** may be performed, for example, by a processor on an instant messaging provider system or a processor on a client system running an instant messaging or chat application.

The process **400**A begins when the processor receives an indication of a user identity and an indication of a digital item that has been shared by the user identity with other communication identities (step **460**). The processor accesses data identifying communications identities with whom the digital item has been shared (step **465**). For example, the process may access permission information in a data structure that associates a digital item and communication identities that are permitted to access the digital item.

The processor accesses presence data for each of the identified communication identities (step **470**). For example, a data structure may include data identifying which communication identities are on-line (e.g., signed in or logged on) to the instant messaging system.

The processor identifies which of the identified communication identities are on-line based on the presence data (step **475**). This may be accomplished, for example, by searching the presence data for identifiers that correspond to the communication identities identified in step **465**.

The processor presents an indication reflecting on-line presence of the identified on-line communication identities (step **480**). In one example, a friends list of the friends with whom the digital item has been shared may present friends that are on-line in one group and friends that are off-line in another group, as described previously. In another example, an icon indicating on-line presence may be displayed adjacent to an identifier of an on-line communications identity in a friends list.

FIGS. **5-8** show exemplary user interfaces **500-800** for enabling a user to permit another user access to a digital item and annotations related to the digital item in the context of an on-line dating application. In general, the user interfaces **500-800** enable a user to electronically search for potential dating prospects, to select a subset of the identified dating prospects as candidate dating prospects (which may be referred to as "keepers"), to share with friends some or all of the candidate dating prospects (or keepers) along with comments about the candidate dating prospects, and to view a friend's candidate dating prospects.

Referring to FIG. **5**, an exemplary user interface **500** is shown that allows a user to search digital profiles of potential dating prospects. The user interface **500** includes interface tabs **505**, **605**, **705** and **805** that enable a user to select which of the user interfaces **500-800** are displayed, respectively. As shown, interface tab **505** is activated.

The user interface **500** includes search criteria selector **510** that allows the user to search for profiles with particular attributes. For example, in the context of on-line dating, the search criteria **510** may include criteria such as gender, age, and zip code or another type of location indicator. The search button **520** allows the user of interface **500** to initiate a search the profiles in the database using the search criteria entered in search criteria selector **510**.

The user interface **500** displays the result of the user's search with a photograph **530**A-**530**F of each potential dating prospect that matches the entered search criteria **510**. Each resulting photograph **530**A-**530**F has an associated check box **531**A-**531**F so that the user may select any of photographs **530**A-**530**F as a candidate dating prospect (e.g., a keeper).

The control **540** is operable to associate the selected photographs **530**A-**530**F and any corresponding profiles with the user identity manipulating the user interface **500**. In the example shown in the user interface **500**, the user has selected photograph **530**A (i.e., photograph 1), photograph **530**B (i.e., photograph 2), and photograph 5 (i.e., photograph 5) to add to user's "My Keepers" list. Activating control **540** adds the selected photographs to the user's "My Keepers" list.

FIG. **6** shows an exemplary interface **600** that enables the user to view the items in the user's "My Keepers" list. This example is a continuation of the example shown in FIG. **5**, in which the user selected photographs **530**A, **530**B and **530**E to be added to the user's "My Keepers" list. Similarly to the user interface **500** of FIG. **5**, the user interface **600** includes interface tabs **505**, **605**, **705** and **805** that enable a user to select which of the user interfaces **500-800** are displayed, respectively. As shown, interface tab **605** is activated.

The user interface **600** shows keepers **600**A, **600**B and **600**E, each of which correspond to one of the selected photographs **530**A, **530**B and **530**E of FIG. **5**. Each of the keepers **600**A, **600**B and **600**E includes a corresponding photograph **630**A, **630**B or **630**E and a corresponding summary **632**A, **632**B or **632**E. In this example, the summary includes textual information presented for a keeper including the dating prospect's age and the city in which the dating prospect lives or works. Other textual information from the profile for the dating prospect also may be presented.

Each of keepers **600**A, **600**B and **600**E also includes a control **633**A, **633**B or **633**E to add a note about the keeper, a control **634**A, **634**B or **634**E to view more profile information about the keeper, and a control **635**A, **635**B or **634**E to delete the keeper from the user's "My Keepers" list.

The user interface **600** also includes a note pad **640** that displays notes about a keeper. In this example, the keeper **600**A is selected as shown by the thicker lines for the border for keeper **600**A relative to the thickness of the lines for the borders for keepers **600**B and **600**E. The note pad **640** displays notes entered about the selected keeper. The note pad **640** may be an implementation of note pad **430** of FIG. **4**.

The user interface **600** includes an on-line friends window **630**, which identifies which of the user's friends are currently on-line, and an offline friends window **648**, which identifies which of the user's friends are currently offline. The user may send an instant message to a friend who is currently on-line by activating the send message control **650**.

If the user's "My Keepers" list contains too many items to display on the user interface **600** at one time, the user may scroll through the user's keepers using the previous page control **660** and the next page control **670**.

Referring also to FIG. **7**, an exemplary user interface **700** allows the user to select items in his or her "My Keepers" list to share with other users. The user interface **700** allows the user to indicate which items in the list, if any, are shared with other users and whether the notes associated with the items are also shared. Similarly to the user interfaces **500** of FIGS. **5** and **600** of FIG. **6**, the user interface **700** includes interface tabs **505**, **605**, **705** and **805** that enable a user to select which of the user interfaces **500**-**800** are displayed, respectively. As shown, interface tab **705** is activated.

The user interface **700** includes a display window **700**A, **700**B and **700**C for each item in the user's "My Keepers" list. In the context of on-line dating, each display window **700**A, **700**B or **700**C includes a photograph **730**A, **730**B or **730**E and summary **732**A, **732**B or **732**E of the profile associated with the photograph **730**A, **730**B or **730**E. Each display window **700**A, **700**B or **700**C also includes a notes check box **736**A, **736**B or **736**E to indicate that a user identified in the identity window **750** is permitted to view notes associated with the keeper **700**A, **700**B or **700**C.

The user interface **700** also includes identity window **750** that enables the user to share the user's "My Keepers" list with any of the user's friends (other users) listed in identity window **750**. Each friend **750**A-**750**E shown in the identity window **750** has a corresponding identity check box **751**A-**751**E. To share an item in the "My Keepers" list with particular friends in the identity window **750**, the owner of the "My Keepers" list selects the check box **751**A-**751**E corresponding to the particular friends and selects the keepers that are to be shared.

The owner selects the items in the list to share by highlighting the items' display box **700**A, **700**B or **700**E. In this example, the owner of the "My Keepers" list has indicated that the keepers **700**A and **700**B (which are highlighted relative to display window **700**E, as shown by the relative thickness of the border line around each display window) are to be shared with users **750**A, **750**B and **750**E. The notes associated with each of the keepers **700**A and **700**B are to be shared, as shown by the note check boxes **736**A and **736**B being checked. In this example, the user has indicated that friends **750**A, **750**C and **750**E are permitted to access keepers **700**A and **700**B and notes associated with each of the keepers **700**A and **700**B.

Alternatively, the owner can share all items in his or her "My Keepers" list with all of the friends shown in identity window **750** by activating control **754**. The owner may share all of the notes associated with the selected items in the user's "My Keepers" list by activating control **756**. The user interface also includes control **766** to persistently store the permissions settings, as described previously.

Referring also to FIG. **8**, the exemplary user interface **800** displays the keepers of one of the user's friends. The user interface **800** includes interface tabs **505**, **605**, **705** and **805** that enable a user to select which of the user interfaces **500**-**800** are displayed, respectively. As shown, interface tab **805** is activated.

The user interface **800** displays an indication **810** of the user identity of the friend whose keepers are being displayed in the interface **800**. The user interface **800** also includes keepers **800**A, **800**B and **800**C that are associated with the user identity identified in indication **810**.

Similar to keepers **600**A, **600**B and **600**E of FIG. **6**, each of the keepers **800**A, **800**B, and **800**C includes a photograph, a summary, an add-note control, and a view-profile control. For example, the keeper **800**A includes a photograph **802**A, a summary **803**A, an add-note control **804**A and a view-profile control **805**A. In some implementations, an add-note control is only displayed when the user to whom the interface is displayed is permitted to add annotations to a keeper.

The user interface **800** also includes a note pad **840** that displays notes for a selected keeper. As shown, the keeper **800**A is selected (as shown by the thickness of the window border of keeper **800**A relative to the thickness of the window borders of keepers **800**B and **800**C) and notes presented in the note pad **840** relate to the selected keeper **800**A.

The user interface **800** also indicates whether the user's friends (other users that the user of interface **800** has shared items with) are currently on-line. To do so, the user interface **800** includes an on-line friends window **844** and an offline friends window **848**. The send-message control **850** is operable to display an instant messaging user interface that enables the user to compose and send a message to one of the on-line friends by identifying the user identity in the on-line friend window **844**. As shown, friend **844**A is selected.

The user interface also includes a see-keepers-of-friend control **855** operable to enable the user to view the keepers of the friend selected in the on-line friends window **844** or the offline friends window **848** (here, friend **844**A). In the example shown in interface **800**, friends **844**A (i.e., "user 1") and **844**B (i.e., "user 5") are currently on-line and the user has selected friend **844**A (i.e., "user 1") in friends on-line window **844**. Because friend **844**A is on-line and selected, the user of interface **800** could send a message to friend **844**A in addition to viewing the keepers of friend **844**A, which are already displayed on interface **800**.

If the friend's "My Keepers" list contains too many items to display on interface **800**, the user may scroll through the keepers on the friend's list with the previous page control **860** and the next page control **870**.

FIG. **9** shows a communications system **900** that is capable of allowing sharing of digital items and annotations related to the digital items. The communications system **900** is capable

of providing access to digital items and annotations to each of client systems **905**A and **905**B. A host system **920** and a network **915** are used to facilitate the access to such digital content.

More particularly, users of the communications system **900** are distributed geographically and use client systems **905**A and **905**B to access digital items and annotations stored on host system **920**. The client systems **905**A and **905**B are shown as including, respectively, communication applications **907**A and **907**B. The network **915** interconnects the client systems **905**A and **905**B. The client systems **905**A and **905**B are connected to network **915** through various communication paths **917**, such as a modem connected to a telephone line using, for example, serial line internet protocol (SLIP) or point-to-point protocol (PPP) or a direct network connection using, for example, transmission control protocol/internet protocol (TCP/IP). The host **920** also is connected to the network **915** over communication pathway **917** and is used to facilitate some direct or indirect communications between the host system **920** and client systems **905**A and **905**B.

Each of the client systems **905**A and **905**B may be implemented using, for example, a general-purpose computer capable of responding to and executing instructions in a defined manner, a personal computer, a special-purpose computer, a workstation, a server, a device, a component, or other equipment or some combination thereof capable of responding to and executing instructions. The client systems **905**A and **905**B may receive instructions from, for example, a software application, a program, a piece of code, a device, a computer, a computer system, or a combination thereof, which independently or collectively direct operations, as described herein.

The client systems **905**A and **905**B include communications applications **907**A and **907**B having instructions to facilitate communications between the host system **920** and the client systems **905**A and **905**B. For instance, such communications applications may include e-mail programs, instant message programs, file transfer protocol (FTP) programs, and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) programs. Another example of a communications application is a web browser or an application-specific program for communicating with the host system **920**. The instructions may be embodied permanently or temporarily in any type of machine, component, equipment, storage medium, or propagated signal that is capable of being delivered to the client systems **905**A and **905**B for execution.

The communication applications **907**A or **907**B also may include contact lists that include communications identities ("friends") with which messages are exchanged using the respective client systems **905**A and **905**B. For example, the messages exchanged may be instant messages, electronic mail (e-mail) messages, text messages or audio messages, including voice messages.

More particularly when the communication applications **907**A or **907**B are instant message applications, the instant message applications **907**A and **907**B include a contact list for each user that uses the client systems **905**A and **905**B to send and receive instant messages. The contact list also may be referred to as a participant list or a friend list. The instant message applications **907**A and **907**B enable the users to send and receive instant messages with the client systems **905**A and **905**B. Instant messages are sent between users of the client systems **905**A and **905**B through an instant message server **930** on the host system **920**. In one example, a contact list may be a BuddyList® of AOL Instant Messager® available from America On-line, Inc. of Dulles, Va.

The client systems **905**A and **905**B include a communications interface (not shown) used by the communications programs to send communications through network **915**. The communications may include e-mail, audio data, video data, general binary data, or text data (e.g., encoded in American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) format). Client systems also include one or more input devices, such as a keyboard, a mouse, a stylus, or a microphone, as well as one or more output devices, such as a monitor, a touch screen, speakers, or a printer.

The network **915** typically includes a series of portals interconnected through a coherent system. Examples of the network **915** include the Internet, Wide Area Networks (WANs), Local Area Networks (LANs), analog or digital wired and wireless telephone networks (e.g., a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), an Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), or a Digital Subscriber Line of various types (DSL)), or any other wired or wireless network. The network **915** may include multiple networks or subnetworks, each of which may include, for example, a wired or wireless data pathway.

As with the client systems **905**A and **905**B, the host system **920** may be implemented using, for example, a general-purpose computer capable of responding to and executing instructions in a defined manner, a special-purpose computer, a workstation, a server, a device, a component, or other equipment or some combination thereof capable of responding to and executing instructions. The host system **920** may receive instructions from, for example, a software application, a program, a piece of code, a device, a computer, a computer system, or a combination thereof, which independently or collectively direct operations, as described herein. These instructions may take the form of one or more communications programs. Such communications programs may include, for example, e-mail programs, instant message programs, FTP programs, and VOIP programs. The instructions may be embodied permanently or temporarily in any type of machine, component, equipment, storage medium, or propagated signal that is capable of being delivered to the host system **920**.

Further, the host system **920** includes a communications interface (not shown) used by the communications programs to send communications through network **915**. The communications may include e-mail, audio data, video data, general binary data, or text data (e.g., encoded in American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) format).

The host system **920** includes an instant messaging server **930** that operates instant messaging server software configured to process communications sent from and received by users of an instant messaging service. In particular, the instant messaging server **930** is configured to exchange instant messages and communications related to the instant message service between the client systems **905**A and **905**B and the provider system **920** over the network **915**. The instant message server **930** may initiate a point-to-point connection with the client systems **905**A and **905**B, and/or may route instant messages sent with the communication applications **907**A and **907**B.

The instant messaging server **930** includes contact lists **932** that are associated with instant messaging user accounts (e.g., a screen name or other type of instant message identity identifier). The people listed in the contact lists **932** may be referred to as contacts or friends. Each contact information entry in the contact list **932** may identify a screen name (or other type of instant message address or identity identifier) for a contact of the instant message identity to whom the contact list **932** applies (e.g., sender). In some implementa-

tions, the address book may include additional information, such as a name, mailing address information, and telephone numbers. Some implementations may refer to a contact list by other terms, such as address book or user information.

The instant messaging server **930** also includes code segments **934** to manage on-line presence information. The code segments **934** indicate to the instant message server whether the users listed in contact list **932** are on-line (e.g., signed in to the instant message service). The code segments **934** also indicate whether the users in contact list are offline (e.g., not signed in to the instant messaging service).

The host system **920** also includes a digital item server **940**, which enables a user of the instant messaging application **905**A or **905**B to share digital items that are in a list that the user owns. The digital item server **940** stores the user's lists of digital items along with any annotations (or notes) associated with the items in storage area **942**. The storage area **942** may be implemented using a database, though a database need not necessarily be used.

The digital item server **940** also maintains a data store **944** for permissions associated with digital items and annotations related to digital items. When another user requests access to a digital item or a note related to a digital item, the digital item server **940** uses data store **944** to determine whether the user has permission to access the digital item or note.

The digital item server **940** also includes code segments **946** that, when executed, enable an owner of a digital item to indicate that one or more other users are permitted to access the digital item or notes related to the digital item. For example, the code segments **946** may implement a process similar to process **200** of FIG. **2** or may display a user interface similar to, or including aspects of, one of the user interfaces **100**, **300** or **700** of FIG. **1**, **3** or **7**, respectively.

The digital item server **940** may execute code segments **948** to display the shared digital item to a user. In one example, the code segments **948**, when executed, may display a shared digital item and indicate whether a user with whom the digital item has been, or is being shared, is on-line. As such, the code segments **948** may implement a process similar to, or including aspects of, process **400**A of FIG. **4**A. In another example, the code segments **948**, when executed, may display a user interface similar to, or including aspects of, user interfaces **400**, **600** or **800** of FIG. **4**, **6** or **8**, respectively.

FIG. **10** depicts a communications system **1000** that is capable of allowing sharing of digital items and annotations related to the digital items. The system **1000** includes client systems **1005**A and **1005**B, a network **1015**, and a host system **1020** capable of providing access to digital items and annotations. In contrast with the communications system **900** of FIG. **9**, the system **1000** also includes a network access provider **1060**, which provides access to the delivery network **1015** and an e-mail service **1065**. The system **1000** enables a user of a client system to access digital items and annotations even when the user is not an authorized user of the instant messaging service **1030** provided by the host system **1020**.

Each of the client systems **1005**A and **1005**B include a web browser **1007**A or **1007**B capable of communicating with the host system **1020** through the delivery network **1015**.

The host system **1020** includes an instant messaging service **1030** and a digital item service **1040**. The instant messaging service includes contact lists **1032** and code segments **1034** for managing on-line presence information. In the example of system **1000**, the instant messaging service **1030** is operable to enable instant messages to be exchanged only between users who are registered users (or otherwise authorized users) of the instant messaging service **1030**.

The digital item service **1040** enables users to share digital items and annotations with other users, even when a user is not a registered user of the instant messaging service. The digital item service **1040** includes a storage area **1042** for storing a user's lists of digital items and annotations and a data store **1044** for permissions. The digital item service **1040** also includes code segments **1046** that, when executed, enable an owner of a digital item to indicate that one or more other users are permitted to access the digital item or annotation, even when one or more of the other users are not registered users of the instant messaging service **1030**.

The digital item service **1040** includes code segments **1048** to display a shared digital item to a user. The code segments **1048**, when executed, may display a shared digital item and indicate whether a user with whom the digital item has been, or is being shared, is on-line. In such a case, the digital item service **1040** may indicate that a user is on-line only when the user is a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030** and is on-line. In some implementations, the digital item service **1040** may not indicate that a user who is not a registered instant messaging user is on-line even when the user is on-line and accessing the digital item service **1040**. A user for whom online presence information is not available (such as a user who is not a registered user of the instant messaging service **1040**), for example, may be identified as being "offline" regardless of whether the user is on-line or may be identified as having an unknown presence status.

In some implementations, the digital item service **1040** may be able to indicate when a user is on-line and accessing the digital item service **1040**, even when the user is not a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**. This may be accomplished, for example, by managing on-line presence information for authenticated users who are permitted to access the digital item service **1040** and who are not registered users of the instant messaging service **1030**.

In contrast with the communications system **900** of FIG. **9**, the host system **1020** includes an authentication service **1050** capable of authenticating a user of a client system **1005**A or **1005**B, who is not an authorized user of the instant messaging service **1030**. The host system **1020** also includes an e-mail service **1055** that enables a user of a client system **1005**A or **1005**B to send an e-mail message to another user, who need not necessarily be a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**.

In one example, the network access provider **1060** provides access to the delivery network **1015** to the client system **1005**B, enabling a user of the client system **1005**B to access an e-mail service **1065** and the host system **1020**. In this example, the user of the client system **1005**B is not a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**, whereas the user of client system **1005**A is a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**. The user of client system **1005**A is the owner of a list of digital items accessible through the digital item service **1040**.

The user of client system **1005**A accesses the host system **1020** and executes code segments **1046** to indicate that the user of client system **1005**B is permitted to access a digital item or notes related to the digital item that are owned by the user of client system **1005**A. To do so, for example, the user of client system **1005**A may execute code segments **1046** to share digital items with the user of client system **1005**B and, during the process, may identify the user of client system **1005**B by the e-mail address assigned to the user of client system **1005**B by the e-mail service **1065**. In another example, the user of client system **1005**A may identify the user of client system **1005**B by a user identifier assigned by the digital item service for use with the digital item service

during the share process performed by execution of code segments **1046**. In some implementations, the user identifier assigned by the digital item service may be associated with another user identifier, such as an e-mail address or instant message screen name provided by an instant messaging service other than the instant messaging service **1030**.

The user of client system **1005**A may use the e-mail service **1055** to send an e-mail message to the user of client system **1005**B for the purpose of notifying the user of client system **1005**B that a digital item or annotation has been shared with the user. The e-mail message sent to the user of client system **1005**B may include instructions for accessing the shared item and/or a control operable to access the shared item. Examples of such a control include a link to a web page enabling access the digital item service **1040** and a link to a web page to access a particular digital item or a particular list accessible through the digital item service **1040**.

To access the shared digital item or annotation, the user of the client system **1005**B may access the host system **1020** over the delivery network **1015**. The host system **1020** uses the authentication service **1050** to authenticate the user of the client system **1005**B. The authentication service **1050** may implement an open naming standard or industry convention for authenticating a user identity. In this manner, the host system **1020** is able to authenticate the user of the client system **1005**B who is not a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**. The user of client system **1005**B, once authenticated, is permitted to access digital items and annotations using the digital item service **1040**. In some implementations, the user of client system **1005**B, although not a registered user of the instant messaging service **1030**, is able to create and share digital items and annotations with other users.

In some implementations, messaging systems other than e-mail systems may be used to communicate with a user who has been granted permission to access a digital item or annotation. For example, a text messaging system or a telephonic system (such as a system capable of sending voice mail messages) may be used.

In some implementations, the host system **1020** may not include an instant messaging service **1030**. Alternatively or additionally, a third-party may provide a digital item service that uses one or more instant messaging services provided by one or more instant messaging providers. For example, a digital item service may enable a user of the digital item service to contact other users of the digital item service using various messaging means, including a first instant messaging service offered by a first instant message service provider, a second instant messaging service offered by a second instant message service provider, a text messaging service offered by a mobile communications service provider, and an e-mail message service offered by an e-mail service provider. Additionally or alternatively, the users may access the digital item service through various network access providers.

The techniques and concepts generally have been described in the context of an instant messaging system that uses an instant messaging host system to facilitate the instant messaging communication between instant message senders and instant message recipients. Other instant message implementations are contemplated, such as an instant message service in which instant messages are exchanged directly between an instant message sender system and an instant message recipient system. Although discussed above primarily with respect to instant message applications, other implementations are contemplated for providing similar functionality in platforms and on-line applications.

The described systems, methods, and techniques may be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, computer hardware, firmware, software, or in combinations of these elements. Apparatus embodying these techniques may include appropriate input and output devices, a computer processor, and a computer program product tangibly embodied in a machine-readable storage device for execution by a programmable processor. A process embodying these techniques may be performed by a programmable processor executing a program of instructions to perform desired functions by operating on input data and generating appropriate output. The techniques may be implemented in one or more computer programs that are executable on a programmable system including at least one programmable processor coupled to receive data and instructions from, and to transmit data and instructions to, a data storage system, at least one input device, and at least one output device. Each computer program may be implemented in a high-level procedural or object-oriented programming language; or in assembly or machine language if desired; and in any case, the language may be a compiled or interpreted language. Suitable processors include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read-only memory and/or a random access memory. Storage devices suitable for tangibly embodying computer program instructions and data include all forms of non-volatile memory, including by way of example semiconductor memory devices, such as Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory (EPROM), Electrically Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory (EEPROM), and flash memory devices; magnetic disks such as internal hard disks and removable disks; magneto-optical disks; and Compact Disc Read-Only Memory (CD-ROM). Any of the foregoing may be supplemented by, or incorporated in, specially-designed ASICs (application-specific integrated circuits).

It will be understood that various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the claims. For example, advantageous results still could be achieved if steps of the disclosed techniques were performed in a different order and/or if components in the disclosed systems were combined in a different manner and/or replaced or supplemented by other components. Accordingly, other implementations are within the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

receiving, from a first user, a first comment directed toward a digital item;

adding the first comment to a list of comments associated with the digital item;

providing the digital item to a second user;

identifying that the second user has permissions to access comments in the list of comments; and

providing, by at least one processor, based on the second user having permissions to access comments in the list of comments, the digital item and the list of comments associated with the digital item.

2. The method of claim **1**, further comprising receiving, from one or more other users, one or more additional comments directed toward the digital item.

3. The method of claim **2**, further comprising providing, to the second user, an indication of the one or more other users.

4. The method of claim **3**, wherein providing, to the second user, an indication of the one or more other users comprises providing one or more usernames associated with the one or more other users.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
receiving, from a third user, a second comment directed toward the digital item;
adding the second comment to the list of comments associated with the digital item;
detecting access by the second user to the digital item; and
providing, based on the access by the second user to the digital item, the list of comments associated with the digital item.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
receiving, from the second user, a second comment directed toward the digital item;
adding the second comment to the list of comments associated with the digital item.

7. The method of claim 6, further comprising providing the list of comments associated with the digital item to a third user.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
identifying one or more access settings associated with the second user; and
providing, based on the one or more access settings, the list of comments associated with the digital item to the second user.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing a notification to an owner of the digital item that the second user has viewed the digital content item.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the digital item comprises at least one of a graphical image, a photograph, an audio segment, a song, a video segment, a movie, or text.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the first comment directed toward the digital item comprises text.

12. A method comprising:
receiving, from a first plurality of users, comments directed toward a first digital item;
adding the comments to a list of comments associated with the first digital item;
identifying that a user has permissions to access comments in the list of comments; and
providing, to the user by least one processor, the digital item and the list of comments associated with the first digital item based on the second user having permissions to access comments in the list of comments.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising providing the user with an indication of a username for at least one user of the first plurality of users.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising providing, to the user, a user interface that enables the user to share at least a portion of the list of comments associated with the first digital item with a friend associated with the user.

15. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
receiving, from a second plurality of users, comments directed toward a second digital item;
adding the comments directed toward the second digital item to a list of comments associated with the second digital item;
receiving, from the user, a request for the second digital item; and
providing, to the user, the list of comments associated with the second digital item.

16. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
receiving, from the user, a comment directed toward the first digital item;
adding the comment to a list of comments associated with the first digital item.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:
receiving, from another user, a request for the first digital item; and
providing the another user with the list of comments associated with the first digital item including the comments received from the first plurality of users and the comments received from the user.

18. A system comprising:
at least one processor; and
at least one non-transitory computer-readable storage medium storing instructions thereon that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to:
receive, from a first user, a first comment directed toward a digital item;
add the first comment to a list of comments associated with the digital item;
identify that a second user has permissions to access comments in the list of comments; and
provide the digital item and the list of comments to the second user based on the second user having permissions to access comments in the list of comments.

19. The system of claim 18, further comprising instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to receive, from the second user, a request for the list of comments associated with the digital item, wherein the list of comments associated with the digital item comprises the first comment received from the first user.

20. The system of claim 18, further comprising instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to receive, from one or more other users, one or more additional comments directed toward the digital item.

21. The system of claim 20, further comprising instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to provide, to the second user, an indication of the one or more other users.

22. The system of claim 21, further comprising instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to receive, from the second user, a second comment directed toward the digital item.

23. The system of claim 22, further comprising instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the system to provide an indication of the list of comments associated with the digital item to a third user.

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